LEARNING to Reduce Recidivism

A 50-state analysis of postsecondary correctional education policy

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THE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY

November 2005

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank those members of the staff at the Institute for Higher Education Policy who helped make this report possible: Jamie Merisotis, President; Alisa Cunningham, Director of Research; Loretta Hardge, Director of Communications; and Yuliya Keselman, Research Analyst. In addition, Melissa Clinedinst, former Senior Research Analyst, and Patricia Steele and Kimberli Keller, former Graduate Fellows, were instrumental in developing the concept for this report and in assembling much of the background material.

Particular thanks are owed to John Linton, U.S. Department of Education, for his considerable advice and assistance throughout the course of our research. We also appreciate the efforts of Gwynne Cunningham and Phyllis Wilbur, Virginia Department of Correctional Education, who arranged for us to meet with a group of incarcerated men at the Coffeewood Correctional Center for a discussion that opened our eyes to the realities of attending college while in prison.

Our work benefited from the expertise and assistance of a number of people: Roger Bowen, American Association of University Professors; Bob Evans, Windham School District; Kathy Goebel, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Ray Harbert, Maryland State Department of Education; Ray Harrington, North Carolina Community College System; Nancy La Vigne, Urban Institute; Glenn Martin, National H.I.R.E. Network; Marc Mauer, The Sentencing Project; Bill Muth and Renee Ritter, U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons; Mike Parsons, Hagerstown Community College; Dallas Pell, Pell Grants for Public Safety Initiative; Benay Rubenstein, Episcopal Social Services; Steve Steurer, Correctional Education Association; Charlie Sullivan, CURE; Richard Tewksbury, University of Louisville; Michele Welch, Columbus State Community College; and Jeff Wilson, New Mexico Department of Corrections.

We would also like to thank the Ford Foundation for providing generous financial support for this project.

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY v

INTRODUCTION ix

CHAPTER 1: Prisons and Prisoners 1

CHAPTER 2: The Value of Postsecondary Correctional Education 7

CHAPTER 3: The Current Status of Postsecondary Correctional Education in the United States 13

CHAPTER 4: Funding Postsecondary Correctional Education 27

CHAPTER 5: Barriers to Accessing Postsecondary Correctional Education 37

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS 47

REFERENCES 49

APPENDIX 53

Figures and Tables

FIGURE 1. Race/ethnicity of state and federal prisoners with sentences over one year versus the total U.S. population, 2003.

FIGURE 2. Socioeconomic characteristics of state and federal prisoners before arrest versus the total U.S. population, 1997.

FIGURE 3. Highest educational attainment of state and federal prisoners versus the total U.S. population, 1997.

FIGURE 4. Average number of prisoners enrolled in postsecondary correctional education programs, 2003-04.

FIGURE 5. Percentage of prison systems using various factors to determine prisoner eligibility for postsecondary correctional education, 2003-04.

FIGURE 6. Distribution of prisoners enrolled in postsecondary correctional education programs by degree type, 2003-04.

FIGURE 7. Postsecondary correctional education completion rates by degree type, 2003-04.

FIGURE 8. Distribution of institutions providing postsecondary instruction to prisoners, 2003-04.

FIGURE 9. Percentage of prison systems using various means of instruction for postsecondary correctional education, 2003-04.

FIGURE 10. Percentage of state prison systems using various funding sources for postsecondary correctional education, 2003-04.

TABLE 1. Prison systems with at least 1,000 inmates enrolled in postsecondary correctional education, 2003-04.

Executive Summary

Higher education for prisoners, often the subject of public controversy, remains a crucial strategy in efforts to reduce recidivism and slow the growth of the nation's incarcerated population. New research conducted by the Institute for Higher Education Policy shows that corrections officials are finding innovative ways to support postsecondary programs in their prison systems. Despite the loss of Pell Grant eligibility a decade ago, prisoners are participating in higher education in record numbers nationwide. With additional funding and concentrated efforts to reduce the many barriers that still make it difficult for prisoners to gain access to higher education, postsecondary correctional education programs offer the potential to provide incarcerated men and women with a second chance at productive citizenship.

Underlying Principles

This report is based upon several primary assumptions that reflect current research in the field of justice policy. Data collected by the federal government show that prisoners nationwide are far less educated than the general U.S. population and, before incarceration, were significantly more impoverished. Young minority men are particularly overrepresented in American prisons. Overall, the people who make up the incarcerated population are, in fact, those who have had the least opportunity prior to imprisonment.

Furthermore, research studies provide strong evidence that postsecondary correctional education can achieve a variety of important purposes. Higher education can improve conditions within correctional facilities, enhance prisoner self-esteem and prospects for employment after release, and function as a cost-effective approach to reducing recidivism. Educating prisoners also allows them access to the many economic and social benefits associated with higher education. Postsecondary correctional education offers a chance to break the cycle of inequality and benefit both the formerly incarcerated person and the society in which he or she lives.

Key Findings

Recent discussions about the state of higher education for prisoners have focused on the lack of available funding for postsecondary correctional education and the elimination of college programs in prisons following the 1994 loss of Pell Grant eligibility for state and federal prison inmates. The current challenge is to determine what postsecondary correctional education programs exist and how corrections officials fund and implement those programs. The Institute for Higher Education Policy undertook an original survey of correctional education administrators to gather data about these questions. This report uses that survey to examine the details of postsecondary correctional education programs in the state and federal prison systems as of 2003-04. Key findings from the study include:

- Out of the 46 prison systems responding to the survey, 44 reported offering higher education to at least some inmates. The percentage of prisoners enrolled in postsecondary correctional education programs has returned to the levels found before eligibility for the Pell Grants was eliminated, and because of significant growth in the prison population, the actual number of incarcerated men and women taking college-level classes during 2003-04 was substantially higher than in the years leading up to 1994. Nonetheless, postsecondary correctional education was still available only to about 5 percent of prisoners, and degree completion rates were low.

- The 15 higher-enrollment prison systems identified in this report—each with more than 1,000 prisoners taking college classes—enrolled 89 percent of all incarcerated students and awarded 96 percent of all degrees and certificates granted to prisoners nationwide. Prison systems with larger postsecondary enrollments tend to have sizeable inmate populations, a focus on shorter vocational degree and certificate programs, and substantial public funding for postsecondary correctional education.

- Sixty-two percent of prisoners who took college classes and 92 percent of those who earned a credential in 2003-04 were enrolled in vocational certificate programs for college credit. While these programs may be valuable in ensuring that prisoners are able to complete a credential while incarcerated, it is worth noting that prison inmates are not earning college degrees, even at the associate's level, in any significant numbers.

- At the time of the Institute survey, instruction for postsecondary correctional education programs was most often offered by public two-year (community) colleges. Very few private, for-profit institutions offered college courses in prisons. On-site instruction was the most frequent instructional method, but some prison systems offered distance education programs using video or satellite instruction. Internet technology was rarely used because of security concerns.

- Federal Incarcerated Youth Offender (IYO) block grants were the most commonly cited source of funding for postsecondary correctional education programs in state prison systems. State appropriations and prisoner self-funding were also important sources of funds. Higher-enrollment prison systems were significantly more likely to rely on state funding for their postsecondary correctional education programs while lower-enrollment systems most often relied on IYO funding.

- Survey respondents indicated that a lack of funding is the key barrier that prevents prison systems from enrolling more incarcerated students in college courses. Eligibility restrictions limit the number of prisoners who can be funded under the IYO grants, which makes it difficult for states to develop extensive postsecondary correctional education programs. State funding, the likely alternative, has been reduced or eliminated in some states. Prisoner self-funding is, for the most part, unfeasible because few incarcerated people earn enough money to cover the cost of college classes.

- A number of additional barriers also prevent prisoners from enrolling in, and completing, postsecondary programs.

  - Poor academic preparation means that many incarcerated students need remediation, especially in English and math, before taking college-level courses.

- Security protocols at correctional facilities can make it difficult to conduct college classes. Other logistical problems include the remote location of many prisons and difficulties in hiring and retaining instructors to work on-site.
- Prison overcrowding often results in involuntary transfer from one correctional facility to another which interrupts coursework sequences and prevents inmates from completing their degree or certificate programs.
- Corrections officials, correctional educators, and higher education administrators sometimes have conflicting priorities that can hinder the development of effective policies to promote postsecondary correctional education.

- Above all, a lack of support for postsecondary correctional education programs among policymakers and the public makes each of these barriers more challenging to overcome.

Policy Recommendations

➤ **Additional funding is needed to increase the number of prisoners who have access to higher education.**

- Reinstate Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated men and women.
- Expand the federal Incarcerated Youth Offender grant program by increasing funding, raising the age limit for eligible prisoners to age 35, and eliminating the per-year, per-student spending cap.
- Eliminate the 1 percent cap on the use of Carl D. Perkins Vocational–Technical Education Act funding for prison programs.
- Increase state appropriations for postsecondary correctional education programs.
- Ensure that public colleges and universities receive state formula funding for serving incarcerated students.
- Allow incarcerated students to receive state need-based grants as low-income students.
- Increase private funding for postsecondary correctional education programs by soliciting resources from foundations, colleges and universities, corporations, and private individuals.

➤ **State-level support is essential if postsecondary correctional education programs are to thrive.**

- Encourage effective working relationships among state agencies responsible for corrections, correctional education, and higher education.
- Build partnerships between postsecondary correctional education programs and colleges and universities, especially community colleges.

- Develop state and institutional policies that strongly support postsecondary correctional education. Such policies include:
  - Encouraging experiments with distance education methods, including Internet-based distance education using secure network connections.
  - Offering placement testing, testing for learning disabilities, and opportunities for remedial education to improve the students' chances of success in college-level courses.
  - Providing funding for corrections staff to participate in the college courses offered at correctional facilities.
  - Guaranteeing that prisoners will not be involuntarily transferred, except for disciplinary reasons, while enrolled in college classes.

➤ **Building state-level support for postsecondary correctional education will necessarily involve educating policymakers and the public.**

- Publicize successful outcomes from postsecondary correctional education programs.
- Enlist support from advocacy organizations in the areas of prisoner rehabilitation and re-entry and access to higher education for disadvantaged groups.
- Begin a national dialogue and frame the conversation in terms of inmate accountability—the idea that prisoners should make some attempt at self-improvement while incarcerated.

Introduction

Enormous increases in the U.S. prison population over the last two decades have led to the release from prison of correspondingly large numbers of people. In 2003 alone, more than 650,000 men and women left state and federal prisons (Harrison & Beck 2005). At the end of 2003, almost three-quarters of a million American adults were on parole. Many of these formerly incarcerated people, however, quickly return to prison. Statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice suggest that less than half of parolees successfully complete their parole (Glaze & Palla 2004). Recidivism, whether defined as re-arrest, reconviction, or return to prison, is also disturbingly high. In fact, a longitudinal study determined that, within three years, 68 percent of prisoners released in 1994 were arrested for a new offense, 47 percent were reconvicted, and 52 percent returned to prison, either for a new sentence or for a parole violation (Langan & Levin 2002).

These numbers indicate a serious problem with the nation's criminal justice system. Prison populations continue to increase, at an annual cost of nearly $30 billion (Stephan 2004), but crime rates, after dropping throughout the 1990s during a period of strong economic growth, have leveled off. More than 20 percent of American households continue to be victimized by crime each year (Catalano 2004). Meanwhile, prisoners are serving longer sentences than in the past but are then released without the education or skills necessary to find productive employment. These formerly incarcerated people return to their communities—frequently those areas with the least capacity to provide them with needed assistance—and all too often end up returning to prison (Travis, Solomon, & Waul 2001). Without significant attention by policymakers to the problem of prisoner re-entry, this situation is likely to intensify, resulting in a continuous cycle of poverty and crime.

Is education the answer?

Despite limited funding and a frequent lack of public support, corrections officials have made efforts to establish prison programming that helps inmates successfully re-enter society after release from prison. Such programs include substance abuse treatment, life skills training such as anger management, vocational training, employment in prison industries, and educational programs at all levels from adult basic education to postsecondary education. By improving the mental, physical, and social well-being of prisoners, as well as providing them with job training and other skills, these programs benefit society at large by reducing crime and strengthening communities (Lawrence et al 2002). Prison programming also allows prisoners, by trying to improve themselves while incarcerated, to make a contribution to society in return for their room and board.

Among the various types of programming available to prisoners, postsecondary education serves a particularly important role. Research consistently demonstrates that participation in educational programs while incarcerated reduces recidivism rates by increasing an individual's ability to successfully rejoin mainstream society upon release from prison

(Chappell 2004). Offering higher education to prisoners, very few of whom have had the opportunity to attend college prior to incarceration, may be especially valuable in a society where postsecondary credentials are increasingly necessary to gain access to living-wage jobs. Formerly incarcerated people often experience difficulties in gaining employment after release from prison, both because they lack marketable skills and because they may face discrimination due to their criminal records (Travis, Solomon, & Waul 2004). Without jobs that pay a living wage, ex-offenders often return to criminal activity. Postsecondary correctional education programs can overcome these difficulties by offering formerly incarcerated men and women the opportunity to gain access to the many benefits that higher education offers in American society.

Postsecondary correctional education programs have a substantial history in the United States, dating back to the early nineteenth century. Until the 1960s, however, the idea of providing publicly funded higher education for prisoners was not widely embraced. By the end of that decade, more than half of U.S. states offered higher education programs, including on-site instruction, to inmates in their prison systems (Gehring 1997). These prison education programs received an enormous boost in 1972 with the creation of the Pell Grant program, which provided a significant source of higher education funding for prisoners, most of whom were eligible for federal need-based financial aid (Wright 2001). By the 1980s, however, the War on Drugs and other "tough on crime" efforts led to enormous increases in the prison population, reducing available funding for all prison programming (Spangenberg 2004). Nonetheless, a 1983 study of correctional education programs found that 41 state prison systems offered postsecondary programs, enrolling almost 5 percent of the prison population nationwide (Ryan & Woodard 1987).

A public debate in the early 1990s about the use of Pell Grants to fund higher education for prisoners led to a provision in the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 that no person incarcerated in a state or federal correctional facility could receive a Pell Grant. Crucial arguments underlying this debate suggested that awarding Pell Grants to prisoners was unacceptable in an era of budget cuts for social programs, and that such grants took money that could have been better used to assist law-abiding college students in paying for school. These arguments were based on false assumptions about the extent of Pell Grant funding that went to prisoners. In fact, during the 1993-94 academic year, approximately 27,000 prisoners received around $35 million in Pell Grant funding, less than 1 percent of the total $6 billion spent on the program that year. Moreover, no students were ever denied a Pell Grant because of prisoner participation in the program (Institute for Higher Education Policy 1994).

The loss of Pell Grant funding had an immediate adverse impact on postsecondary correctional education. A 1995 study by the American Correctional Association found that the number of states offering such programs dropped, in one year, from 37 to 26 while prisoner enrollment in postsecondary programs dropped nearly 40 percent during the same time frame (Wees 1995). This decline in programming continued in subsequent years. By 1997, another American Correctional Association study found only 21 states that offered formal postsecondary education programs in their prisons. Those programs enrolled less than 2 percent of the total prison population nationwide (American Correctional Association 1997).

In 1998, Congress created a program that provides block grants to help state prison systems fund postsecondary education for youthful offenders, defined as those age 25 and younger. These Incarcerated Youthful Offender (IYO) grants allowed most states to create or expand postsecondary programs in their prisons, albeit for a limited pool of participants. The IYO grants, together with state funding in at least some states, have led to increases in the number of prisoners participating in postsecondary correctional education programs over the last several years, but the total number of participants still represent only a small fraction of those who could benefit from access to higher education while incarcerated. In addition, the IYO program must be reauthorized and funded by Congress every year, leaving open the possibility that funds could be eliminated at any time.

Overview of this report

Over the last decade, a number of academic and policy studies have focused on the lack of funding available for postsecondary correctional education and on the elimination of postsecondary programs in prisons following the loss of Pell Grant eligibility for state and federal prisoners. Far less research, however, has examined current postsecondary correctional programs in the state and federal prison systems to determine what programs exist and how corrections officials have funded and implemented them. This report aims to expand that understanding.

The conclusions drawn by this report are based on a number of sources, most importantly the Institute survey of correctional education administrators in all 50 states plus the Federal Bureau of Prisons. This survey asked specific questions regarding the postsecondary programs offered in each prison system—including enrollment levels, eligibility requirements, instructional methods, graduation rates, and funding sources. The survey also encouraged respondents to discuss particular barriers that reduce access to higher education in their prison systems and innovative programs, if any, that have been implemented to overcome these barriers. Forty-five states plus the Federal Bureau of Prisons responded to the Institute survey, a 90 percent response rate.[1] Additional data were collected through interviews with correctional education personnel and from a review of published material on the subject.

This report is organized into five chapters, beginning with a chapter on the demographics of the U.S. prison population, illustrating the extent to which incarcerated men and women represent a sector of the larger population that has not had adequate access to educational opportunities even before entering prison. Chapter Two reviews the available literature on the value of postsecondary correctional education, with particular attention to the many studies that link correctional education programs to reduced recidivism. The heart of the report is Chapter Three, which presents the data collected from the Institute survey of correctional education administrators and develops a detailed picture of the current state of postsecondary correctional education in the United States. Chapters Four and Five then use this data to examine the many barriers, financial and otherwise, that prevent prisoners from gaining access to postsecondary education during their incarceration.

[1]Information on survey format and methodology can be found in the Appendix.

CHAPTER 1:

Prisons and Prisoners

On June 30, 2004, there were 1,410,404 men and women incarcerated in state or federal prisons in the United States, representing about two-thirds of the nation's prison population, with the remainder in the custody of local jails.[2] This number has grown by 31 percent since 1995, straining state and federal budgets (Harrison & Beck 2005). Prison construction has boomed. Between 1995 and 2000, 204 additional adult correctional facilities were added to the national count, a 14 percent increase (Stephan & Karberg 2003). As of midyear 2004, one out of every 138 U.S. residents was incarcerated (Harrison & Beck 2005). However, the incarceration rate is not evenly distributed across the population. Certain subpopulations are dramatically overrepresented in this country's prisons, including those who are poor, those of minority race or ethnicity, and those who are undereducated. This chapter outlines the demographic characteristics of those incarcerated by gender and age, race, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment.

Gender and age

The prison population is not an accurate reflection of the U.S. population in many regards, including gender and age. Although the incarceration rate of women has increased more rapidly than that of men in recent years, in December 2003, 93 percent of prisoners under state and federal jurisdiction were male. Within the U.S. population, men are almost 15 times more likely to be incarcerated than women. This statistic translates to a ratio of one in every 109 men versus only one in every 1,613 women incarcerated in a state or federal prison at the end of 2003 (Harrison & Beck 2004).

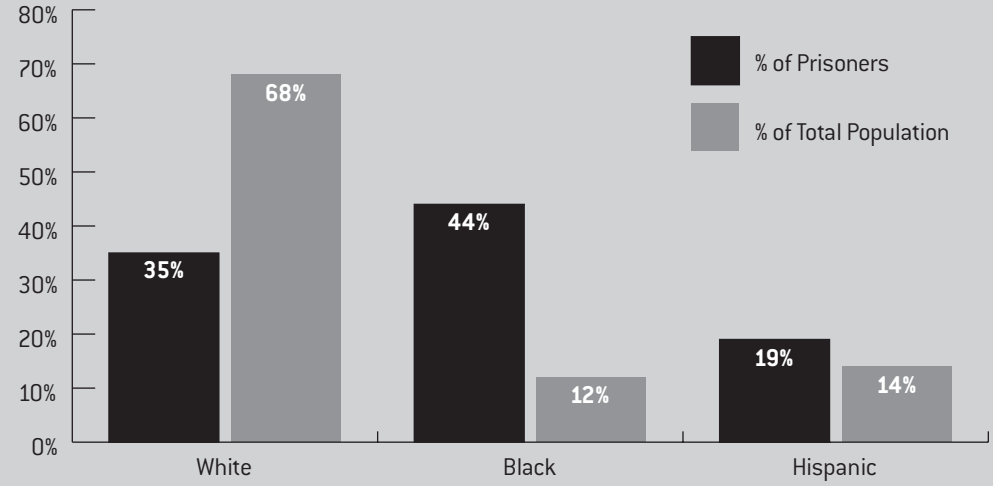
As of December 2003, just over half of prison inmates were 18-34 years of age. Although prisoners under age 35 currently represent the majority in the prison population, this population is aging—a result of both longer prison sentences and increases in criminal convictions among older people. Since 1995, prisoners over age 40 have accounted for 55 percent of the total growth in the prison population (Harrison & Beck 2004).

Race

Although most people likely realize that certain racial and ethnic groups are overrepresented in the prison population, the magnitude of the imbalance is worth special

[2] Unless otherwise specified, the data reported in this section refer to prisoners under state and federal jurisdiction as defined by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, which "includes inmates in custody and persons under the legal authority of a prison system but held outside its facilities" (Harrison and Beck 2005). The data do not include the many prisoners held in the custody of locally managed jails.

Figure 1: Race/ethnicity of state and federal prisoners with sentences over one year versus the total U.S. population, 2003



SOURCES: Harrison & Beck 2004; U.S. Census Bureau 2004

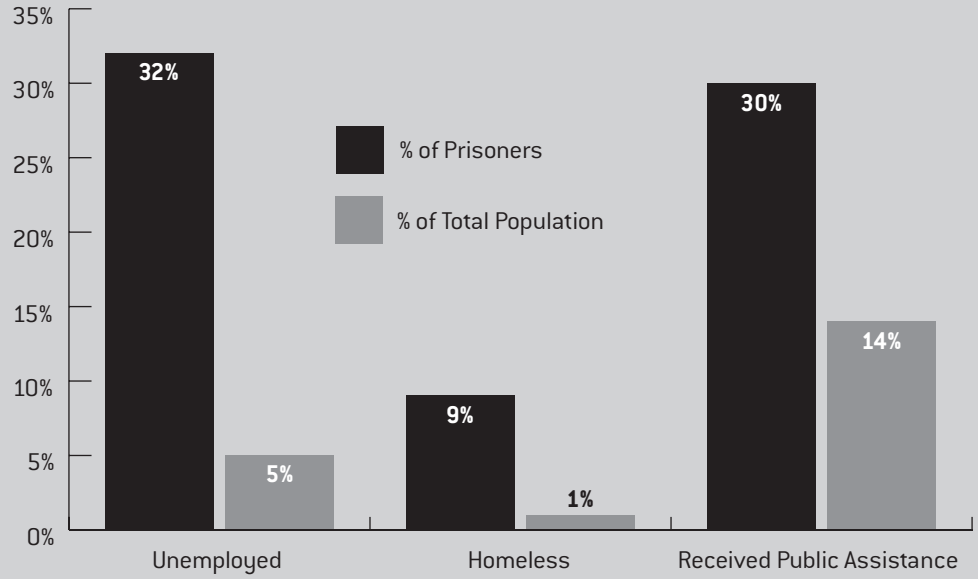
attention (Figure 1). In 2003, Blacks, who account for only 12 percent of the general population, comprised 44 percent of all prisoners with sentences greater than one year. Hispanics, about 14 percent of the general population, accounted for 19 percent of all prisoners with sentences greater than one year. In contrast, while the general population was 68 percent White, non-Hispanic, this group made up only 35 percent of prisoners with sentences over one year (Harrison & Beck 2004; U.S. Census Bureau 2004). If incarceration rates remain unchanged, about one in three Black men and one in six Hispanic men are expected to go to prison during their lifetime as opposed to only one in 17 White men (Bonczar 2003).

Socioeconomic status

Prior to incarceration, prisoners were, in general, considerably more impoverished than the general population (Figure 2). In 1997, 32 percent of state and federal prisoners reported that they were unemployed in the month prior to arrest, vastly higher than the 1997 average unemployment rate of 5 percent for the U.S. population as a whole or even the 10 percent average unemployment rate found among Black Americans that year (U.S. Dept. of Justice 2001; U.S. Census Bureau 1999).[3] Moreover, nearly 9 percent of these prisoners were homeless during the month prior to arrest, compared with the estimated 1 percent of the U.S. population that experiences homelessness at some point over the course of a given year (U.S. Dept. of Justice 2001; Burt 2000).

[3] The Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, produced by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, is the primary national source of information about prisoners prior to their arrest. This survey was last conducted in 1997 and more recent data are not available.

Figure 2: Socioeconomic characteristics of state and federal prisoners before arrest versus the total U.S. population, 1997



SOURCES: U.S. Dept. of Justice 2001; U.S. Census Bureau 1999; Burt 2000; Curry, Mills, & Valdisera 1998

In terms of income, 43 percent of prisoners in 1997 reported making less than $800 per month prior to arrest.[4] This monthly income translates into less than $9,600 annually, slightly higher than the national poverty rate of $8,183 annually for a single person in 1997 (U.S. Dept. of Justice 2001; Dalaker & Naifeh 1998). Since more than half of prisoners reported having minor children at the time they entered prison, many of these families can be assumed to have been living in poverty (Mumola 2000a). Certainly, 30 percent of prisoners in 1997 reported having received some form of public assistance before entering prison, compared to the 14 percent of the general population who received means-tested assistance that year (U.S. Dept. of Justice 2001; Curry, Mills, & Valdisera 1998).

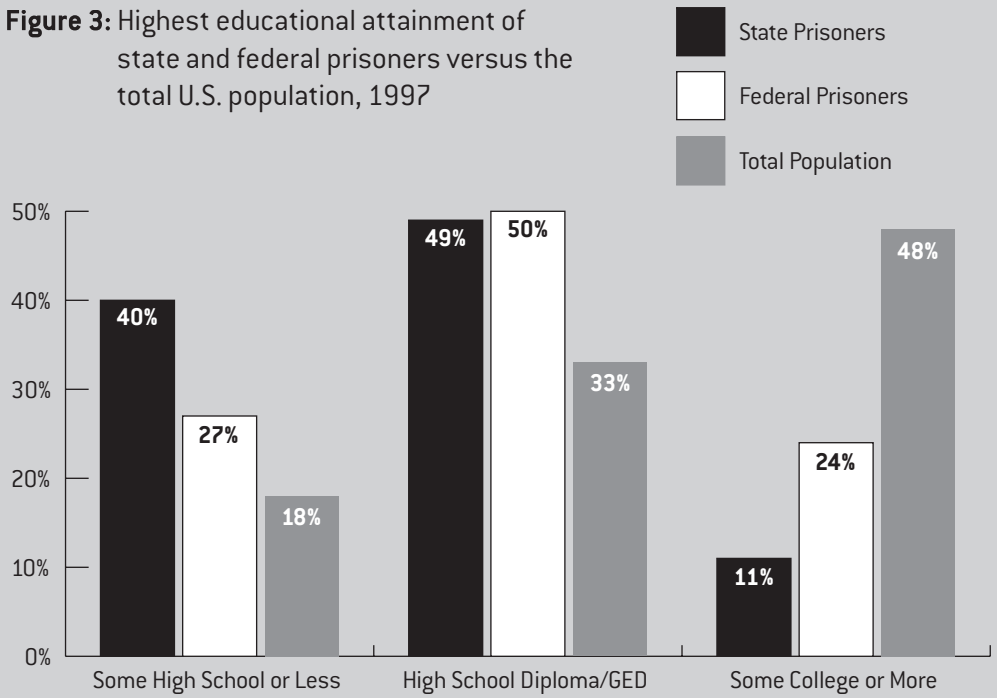
Poverty among Black prisoners prior to arrest was even more pronounced than for White prisoners. While 37 percent of Black prisoners reported being unemployed prior to arrest, only 26 percent of White prisoners were unemployed. The income of Black prisoners prior to arrest was lower than that of Whites—49 percent of Black prisoners reported monthly incomes of less than $800 compared to 36 percent of White prisoners. Black prisoners were also more likely to have received public assistance at some point—35 percent reported receiving such assistance versus 24 percent of White prisoners (U.S. Dept. of Justice 2001).

Educational attainment

An examination of the educational attainment of prison inmates demonstrates that prisoners are much less educated, on average, than their counterparts in mainstream society

[4] This figure may not include illegal sources of income.

Figure 3: Highest educational attainment of state and federal prisoners versus the total U.S. population, 1997



SOURCE: Harlow 2003

(Figure 3). As of 1997, 82 percent of Americans had either graduated from high school or earned a General Educational Development (GED) credential. Among prisoners, on the other hand, only 26 percent of those in state prisons and 41 percent of those in federal prisons had graduated from high school. If GED attainment is included, the education levels for federal prisoners move closer to those of the general population, with 73 percent holding at least a GED or high school diploma. However, the educational attainment of prisoners in the state prison systems continues to lag behind with only 60 percent holding a GED, high school diploma, or higher. Moreover, at least 70 percent of state and federal inmates who held a GED as of 1997 earned it while in prison (Harlow 2003).

The educational divide between the incarcerated population and the general population becomes even more obvious when considering higher education alone. The general population is much more likely to have at least some postsecondary education than is the incarcerated population—as of 1997, nearly half of Americans had attended college at some point, and nearly half of those, 22 percent of the general population, earned some type of college degree. In contrast, only 11 percent of state prisoners in 1997 had at least some college, and only 2 percent were college graduates. Federal prisoners had somewhat more postsecondary education, but even so, only 24 percent had some college, and only 8 percent were college graduates. These findings hold true regardless of race or ethnicity. For all racial and ethnic groups, the general population was four to five times more likely to have attended college than were prisoners (Harlow 2003).

Educational attainment is also related to the socioeconomic characteristics of prisoners prior to incarceration. In the month prior to arrest, 70 percent of state prison inmates

with at least some college were working full time, compared to 48 percent of those with less than a high school diploma. In addition, those with some postsecondary education were more than twice as likely to have earned at least $2,000 in the month before arrest, compared to state prison inmates with less than a high school diploma (Harlow 2003).

There is also a correlation between educational attainment and recidivism. Data suggest that better educated inmates are less likely to relapse into criminal behavior after release from prison. Among prisoners in 1997, 34 percent of those with at least some college were first-time offenders, compared to only 23 percent of those without a high school diploma or GED, suggesting that better educated prisoners are less likely to be repeat offenders. This pattern was particularly evident among prisoners who had a previous juvenile record: 40 percent of prisoners without a high school education and 45 percent of those with a GED had served a prior prison sentence as a juvenile (Harlow 2003). These statistics are, of course, intertwined. Serving a sentence as a juvenile may result in an individual not graduating from high school, and many prisoners earn a GED while incarcerated. Nonetheless, these data serve as a reminder that low educational attainment and incarceration work together to create a population for whom a well-paying job and a secure lifestyle may be very difficult to achieve.

Data suggest that better educated inmates are less likely to relapse into criminal behavior after release from prison.

Implications

The demographic profile presented above suggests that many prisoners have not experienced much opportunity for success prior to incarceration. Prisoners are, in particular, far less educated than the general population and, before incarceration, were significantly more impoverished, even when controlling for such factors as race, age, and gender. As a result, these men and women may have found it difficult to obtain employment at living wages even before entering the criminal justice system.

Moreover, young minority men—a group that has been found to lack access to higher education—are heavily overrepresented in the prison population. Researchers from the Justice Policy Institute have, for instance, found that as of 2000, 30 percent more Black men were in prison than were enrolled in college (Schiraldi & Ziedenberg 2002). In 2003, the same researchers concluded that a Black man in his thirties is twice as likely to experience prison as to earn a college degree (Western, Schiraldi & Ziedenberg 2003). It seems that the very people who make up the prison population are those who have had the least opportunity prior to incarceration. Correctional education programs may, in fact, be a way to help break the cycle of inequality, while at the same time reducing the likelihood of recidivism by preparing incarcerated men and women for productive lives after their release from prison.

CHAPTER 2:

The Value of Postsecondary Correctional Education

Policymakers and the public now seem more willing to offer postsecondary education to incarcerated men and women than they have been in recent years, but significant objections remain. Some argue that it is unfair for prisoners to benefit from publicly subsidized educational programs when law-abiding young people find it difficult to pay for a college education. Others simply believe that the purpose of incarceration is to punish criminals and that to offer educational programs will mitigate this punishment and perhaps reduce the deterrent value of a prison sentence. On the other hand, for many people, including a significant number of corrections officials, the benefits of postsecondary correctional education seem so many and so important that they far outweigh these concerns.

For correctional facilities

Many corrections officials point out that postsecondary correctional education can produce positive results within the prison itself, including improved communication between corrections staff and inmates, the development of positive peer role models for prisoners, and reduced problems with disciplinary infractions (Taylor 1992). A survey of inmates at an Indiana prison, for example, showed that prisoners enrolled in college classes committed 75 percent fewer infractions than the average inmate (Taylor 1994). Corrections officers interviewed for a study of the college program at Bedford Hills—a maximum security prison for women in New York—reported that offering college classes in the facility both reduced disciplinary problems and enhanced the prisoners' self-esteem and ability to communicate effectively (Fine et al 2001). Studies also have shown that postsecondary correctional education programs can break down racial barriers, which in the prison setting are often an underlying cause of disciplinary problems and even violence (Taylor 1994).

For prisoners and their families

For many men and women, moreover, participating in educational programs while incarcerated provides the first taste of academic success they may ever have experienced. Successfully completing a class, or better still completing a degree, can help prisoners recognize that hard work leads to positive results. These successes also can produce changes in attitude that will be valuable after an individual is released from prison. The Bedford Hills study mentioned above found that female prisoners enrolled in a college program

became better able to judge the consequences of their actions and to take responsibility for them. As a result, women in the program were more likely to see themselves as active participants in determining their own future and thus make choices that would help improve their situation (Fine et al 2001).

These successes and changes in attitude, while important on a personal level, also can have far reaching impact. More than half of prisoners have minor children at the time of incarceration. Many of these prisoners—44 percent of men and 64 percent of women in state prisons—lived with their children prior to incarceration and expect to be reunited with them upon release. Most incarcerated parents also report that they maintain regular contact with their children by phone, mail, or visits during their time in prison (Mumola 2000a). For these parents, working toward a college degree may be especially important since it allows them to act as a role model for their children. The Bedford Hills study, for example, found that the children of women enrolled in the program expressed pride in their mothers' academic achievements and became themselves more motivated to attend college (Fine et al 2001).

. . . the most important benefit of postsecondary correctional education is the prospect of improved chances for employment after release from prison.

For prisoners with children, as well as for those without, the most important benefit of postsecondary correctional education is the prospect of improved chances for employment after release from prison. As the previous chapter showed, many prisoners were unemployed or employed at very low-wage jobs prior to incarceration. After release, formerly incarcerated people face the added difficulty of persuading employers to hire them despite their criminal record. In some cases, prisoners may come to believe that they have no hope of ever finding employment, even before they begin a job search.

A college degree earned in prison can help to counterbalance these problems. Research has shown that Americans who have attended college are more likely to be employed than those with only a high school diploma. Furthermore, college-educated workers are more likely to be employed in high-wage jobs. Nationally, the income of those workers with a bachelor's degree was, on average, 93 percent higher than those with only a high school diploma (Institute for Higher Education Policy 2005). These benefits hold true even for those who enter college at a socioeconomic and educational disadvantage. A study of California welfare recipients who attended community college, for example, found that even those who had not completed high school before entering college were able to significantly increase their income after graduating (Mathur et al 2004). For formerly incarcerated people, then, a college education may be the key to finding productive and gainful employment.

For taxpayers

Over the last decade, the number of inmates in state and federal prisons in the United States increased astronomically. At the end of 2003, more than 2.2 million people were incarcerated in all U.S. correctional facilities, at enormous cost to taxpayers (Harrison & Beck 2004). The Department of Justice reported that, as of 2001, state prison systems cost taxpayers almost $30 billion annually and state spending on prisons had increased over 6

percent since 1986. The vast majority of these public dollars built new prisons and kept the existing ones running. Nearly two-thirds of the money, in fact, went to pay the salaries, wages, and benefits of corrections staff while construction expenditures, although down significantly from previous years, still exceeded $800 million in 2001 (Stephan 2004). In an effort to curb this alarming increase in prison costs, some policymakers have proposed alternatives to incarceration including supervised treatment programs for drug offenders, probation with community service, or work-release programs (Peter D. Hart Research Associates 2002).

Offering higher education to prisoners is another potential response to the problem of spiraling costs. Currently, more than half of formerly incarcerated people return to prison within three years, making recidivism a significant cause of the increasing prison population (Langan & Levin 2002). Studies clearly demonstrate that prisoners who participate in postsecondary correctional education have lower recidivism rates than those who do not have access to higher education while incarcerated. For example, one analysis examined 15 different studies conducted during the 1990s and found that 14 of these studies showed reduced recidivism for former prisoners who had participated in postsecondary correctional education. Recidivism rates for these individuals were, on average, 46 percent lower than for ex-offenders who had not taken college classes (Chappell 2004). Such studies indicate that providing higher education to prisoners can help ensure that they will not return to prison after release.

Studies also suggest that postsecondary education, as opposed to other types of prison programming, is particularly effective in reducing recidivism.

Critics argue, however, that these recidivism studies reflect the self-selecting nature of prisoners who pursue higher education, suggesting that such motivated individuals are less likely to relapse into criminal behavior in any case. Recent studies have tried to account for this effect by comparing individuals who participated in educational programming while in prison with those of similar background and motivation levels who did not. One particularly extensive study, which tracked more than 3,000 ex-offenders from three states for a period of three years following their release from prison, found that former prisoners who had participated in education programs were 29 percent less likely to have been sent back to prison at the end of the three-year study (Steurer, Smith, & Tracy 2001). Findings such as these provide evidence that the education itself, rather than the personal characteristics of the prisoners who take advantage of educational opportunities, leads to lower recidivism rates.

Studies also suggest that postsecondary education, as opposed to other types of prison programming, is particularly effective in reducing recidivism. A study of nearly 1,000 former prisoners in Ohio, for instance, compared individuals who completed a college degree while incarcerated to those who completed other types of correctional education programming such as GED preparation courses or non-credit vocational training. This study found that, while earning a GED or completing a vocational program did reduce recidivism, completing an associate's degree had a particularly significant impact, reducing the likelihood of re-incarceration by 62 percent (Batiuk et al 2005). Postsecondary correctional education programs can, therefore, be seen as a highly useful tool in reducing high rates of recidivism.

These numbers also demonstrate that the cost of educating prisoners may well be repaid by a reduction in costs associated with recidivism, particularly by a reduction in the number of people re-incarcerated for a new conviction or parole violation. As of 2001, the average annual cost of incarceration was more than $22,000 per prisoner (Stephan 2004). Therefore, that amount of money is saved each year for each former inmate who does not return to prison. Only a small fraction of corrections budgets, around 6 percent nationwide, is used to pay for all prison programming, including educational programs at all levels as well as a range of other rehabilitative services (American Correctional Association 2003). Even if educational programs are expanded, their per-prisoner cost is far less than the total cost of incarceration. Government analysts in Maryland, for example, used the results of a recidivism study to calculate that education programs saved taxpayers more than $24 million annually, more than twice what the state spends on such programs (Steurer, Smith, & Tracy 2001). Such analyses, moreover, do not consider the added savings that can be gained by reducing recidivism, including reduced reliance on welfare and other publicly subsidized programs and increased taxes paid by formerly incarcerated people employed in higher wage jobs. Clearly, prison higher education programs can be a cost-effective investment of taxpayer dollars (Box 1).

BOX 1: THE FISCAL BENEFITS OF POSTSECONDARY CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION

The state of Texas, in 2004, spent $2.4 billion on corrections, averaging $14,300 per prisoner (Texas Dept. of Criminal Justice 2004). The state's postsecondary correctional education program, however, cost only $3.7 million, a tiny fraction of the overall corrections budget, at a cost of just over $382 per prisoner (Windham School District 2004). Most of the postsecondary correctional education offered in Texas prisons is provided by the state's community colleges. In 2001-02, the most recent year for which data are available, Texas community colleges spent about $2,700 per student, based on total unduplicated headcount (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board 2003). Therefore, the annual cost to the state of Texas for providing postsecondary education to one prisoner is around $3,082.

Data collected by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice show that Texas prisoners who earn an associate's degree while incarcerated return to prison at a rate of 27 percent, compared to a 43 percent recidivism rate for the state prison system as a whole (Windham School District 2004). This reduction means that, of the 415 Texas prisoners who earned associate's degrees in 2004, 66 fewer would return to prison within three years than would have been expected otherwise.

The cost to the state of Texas for providing two years of postsecondary education to the cohort of prisoners who earned associate's degrees in 2003-04 was less than $2.6 million, while the savings to taxpayers for each year the 66 additional ex-offenders remain out of prison would be almost $944,000 (holding per capita incarceration costs constant at 2003-04 levels). At the end of three years, the savings from not incarcerating those 66 people would exceed the costs of educating the entire cohort of prisoners who earned associate's degrees in 2003-04 by almost $274,000. Furthermore, each additional year these former inmates remain out of prison would result in additional savings for the state's taxpayers.

NOTE: This estimate does not represent a net present value calculation nor does it attempt to measure the net social benefit, just the cost savings to taxpayers.

For society as a whole

There is an increasing tendency in the United States to focus on the *private* economic gains of receiving a college degree, by pointing to, for example, the increase in income enjoyed by degree-holders. However, the *public* gains accrued from higher education are equally important. Those citizens who attend college tend to contribute more to the social good through such means as greater tax revenue, greater productivity, decreased reliance on government financial support, greater contributions to the community, and higher participation in civic life such as voting and volunteering. A report by the Institute for Higher Education Policy notes that "failure to invest in college access for all students not only results in diminished personal economic opportunities for low-income students, but also weakens the fabric of society and risks costing the nation more in the long term" (2004).

This argument holds particular relevance in light of the discussion of higher education for prisoners. As indicated in the previous chapter, the prison population includes many individuals who have been poorly served by society. They have, in many cases, suffered the consequences of broken families, inadequate schools, racial discrimination, and physical or sexual abuse. For these men and women, the opportunity to obtain a college education while incarcerated may be the first glimmer of hope that they can escape the cycles of poverty and violence that have dominated their lives. To offer this hope makes postsecondary correctional education more than a means of saving taxpayer dollars, although it will surely do that as well. It becomes a second chance that, if successful, can work to better both the formerly incarcerated person and the society in which he or she lives.

CHAPTER 3:

The Current Status of Postsecondary Correctional Education in the United States

The general perception of postsecondary educational opportunities for prisoners since the loss of the Pell Grants in 1994 has been quite grim. Previously published reports typically indicate low enrollments and even lower completions. Funding is said to be sparse and support from state and federal lawmakers slim. Despite these perceptions, however, little is actually known about the details of correctional education programming in U.S. prisons, including the number of facilities offering postsecondary education, enrollment numbers, eligibility requirements, types of programs offered, degree completions, sources and methods of instruction, and funding sources.

This chapter describes the data collected on these topics from the Institute survey of correctional education administrators in all 50 states plus the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The survey achieved a 90 percent response rate with 45 states plus the Federal Bureau of Prisons responding.[5] Additional qualitative data were collected through telephone and face-to-face interviews with correctional education officials from a number of prisons systems as well as through a review of published material on the topic of postsecondary correctional education.

Prison systems offering postsecondary education

The data collected from this survey suggest that prison postsecondary education programs are, in fact, on the rise. This trend seems to be a relatively new development. As recently as 2002, a similar study found that only 30 state prison systems offered postsecondary education to prisoners (Messemer 2003).[6] As of 2003-04, however, 44 of the 46 prison systems responding to the survey discussed in this report—43 states plus the Federal Bureau of Prisons—reported offering at least some postsecondary education programs.[7] These numbers suggest a recent and hopeful development in postsecondary correctional education.

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[5] Information on survey format and methodology can be found in the Appendix. States not responding to the survey were Florida, Kansas, Kentucky, New Hampshire, and New York.

[6] The author of this study did not include the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

[7] The state prison systems that reported having no postsecondary correctional education programs were South Dakota and Vermont.

Table 1: Prison systems with at least 1,000 inmates enrolled in postsecondary correctional education, 2003-04

Prison System	Number of Inmates Enrolled	Percentage of Inmates Enrolled
Federal Bureau of Prisons	14,780	17%
Texas	9,694	11%
North Carolina	9,220	11%
Washington	6,967	8%
Illinois	5,775	7%
California	4,247	5%
Colorado	4,200	5%
Indiana	3,353	4%
Ohio	3,176	4%
Wisconsin	3,000	4%
Alabama	3,000	4%
Minnesota	2,881	3%
Louisiana	2,100	2%
Arizona	1,666	2%
New Jersey	1,630	2%
All lower enrollment prison systems	9,802	11%
Total Enrollment	**85,491**	**100%**

NOTE: Florida, Kansas, Kentucky, New Hampshire, and New York did not respond to the survey. South Dakota and Vermont have no postsecondary correctional education programs. Idaho and Michigan could not provide enrollment numbers.

SOURCE: Institute Survey 2005

During the data analysis, however, an important pattern emerged, one that will be highlighted throughout this chapter. Out of the 44 prison systems that reported offering postsecondary education programs, only 14 states and the Federal Bureau of Prisons had total enrollments of at least 1,000 incarcerated students for the 2003-04 academic year, and these 15 prison systems enrolled 89 percent of all prisoners who participated in postsecondary correctional education nationwide (Table 1).[8] This finding indicates a need to pay special attention to these higher-enrollment prison systems since they are responsible for much of the postsecondary correctional education currently taking place in the United States (Box 2).

Correctional facilities offering postsecondary education

The prison systems that responded to the Institute survey reported that, on average, 42 percent of their adult correctional facilities offered postsecondary education courses or programs during the 2003-04 academic year.[9] Although this percentage says little

[8]The choice of 1,000 incarcerated students as a cut-off is, of course, arbitrary and results in artificial distinctions such as placing Utah, with 982 postsecondary correctional education participants, in the lower-enrollment group. However, the results revealed by this analysis seem worth making this distinction.

[9]The definition of adult correctional facility used in the Institute survey corresponds to that used by the Bureau of Justice Statistics for its Census of State and Federal Adult Correctional Facilities and includes a variety of types of correctional facilities that house primarily state and federal prisoners. The definition excludes both local jails and facilities for juvenile offenders (Stephan & Karberg 2003).

BOX 2: HIGHER ENROLLMENT IN POSTSECONDARY CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION

Examining more closely the postsecondary correctional educational program in one state can help clarify why some states are able to enroll many more prisoners in college courses than others. North Carolina, which as of December 2003 ranked 14th in the nation in terms of the number of people incarcerated (Harrison & Beck 2004), was second only to Texas in the number of prisoners enrolled in postsecondary correctional education as of 2003-04. North Carolina's success in providing higher education for prisoners illustrates some of the qualities that define the entire group of prison systems that each enrolled at least 1,000 prisoners in college classes that year.

Through a partnership between the Department of Corrections (Division of Prisons) and the North Carolina Community College System, as well as through a contract with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the state of North Carolina was able to offer postsecondary educational programming in almost all of the state's prisons during the 2003-04 academic year. Enrollment reached 9,220 prisoners—nearly 22 percent of the more than 42,000 prisoners who passed through the prison system in 2003 and fully two-thirds of those who held a high school diploma or GED. In 2003-04, North Carolina prisoners were awarded more than 7,000 vocational certificates and 600 associate's degrees for an 86 percent overall completion rate, one of the highest among survey respondents.

These postsecondary educational programs are entirely publicly funded. In the case of classes offered through the state's community colleges, the Division of Prisons provides start-up facilities such as classrooms and lab equipment while the North Carolina Community College System hires instructors and paid their salaries. The community college system then receives formula funding from the state based on the number of student contact hours. The cost of textbooks is divided equally between the two agencies. The state also uses a federal Incarcerated Youth Offender grant to cover postsecondary educational costs for some prisoners.

The goal of this interagency partnership, in place since 1992, has been to reduce excessive growth in the state's incarcerated population by improving an inmate's chance of becoming employed and living a productive life after release. A steering committee made up of representatives from both agencies meets twice each year to set policy and solve problems. Individual prisons and local community colleges work together to provide correctional education programs. A detailed matrix helps determine which correctional facilities—based on the average length of sentence for each facility—can offer each type of postsecondary educational program, thus ensuring that prisoners are enrolled in degree or certificate programs that they will be able to complete while incarcerated.

The experience in North Carolina demonstrates some patterns that help explain the higher enrollments in postsecondary correctional education in certain prison systems. First, the state has a relatively large prison system, although it also enrolls a very high percentage of those prisoners who are eligible to participate in postsecondary education programs. Larger prison systems, which have larger budgets and more eligible prisoners, find it easier to use resources efficiently. In addition, North Carolina's postsecondary correctional education programs emphasize short-term vocational certificates and associate's degrees. These shorter degree programs support the enrollment of more prisoners and improve their chances of completion.

Above all, North Carolina's state government has made a strong commitment to postsecondary correctional education programs and has recognized that such programs are ultimately cost-effective ways to reduce the prison population. This sort of state support can be seen in both the public funding of these programs and in the strong interagency partnership that coordinates them. State-level support is essential to overcoming the many barriers that prevent prison systems from offering higher education to prisoners

about the types of programs available, it indicates that, contrary to popular perception, postsecondary education is available to inmates in a significant number of prisons in the United States.

This percentage shifts substantially when comparing the higher-enrollment group—the 15 prison systems with at least 1,000 prisoners enrolled in postsecondary correctional education—to the state prison systems with lower enrollments. The states in the lower-enrollment group offered postsecondary correctional education in only 35 percent of their adult correctional facilities, while 54 percent of the adult correctional facilities in the higher-enrollment prison systems offered postsecondary correctional education.

Prisoners enrolled in postsecondary correctional education

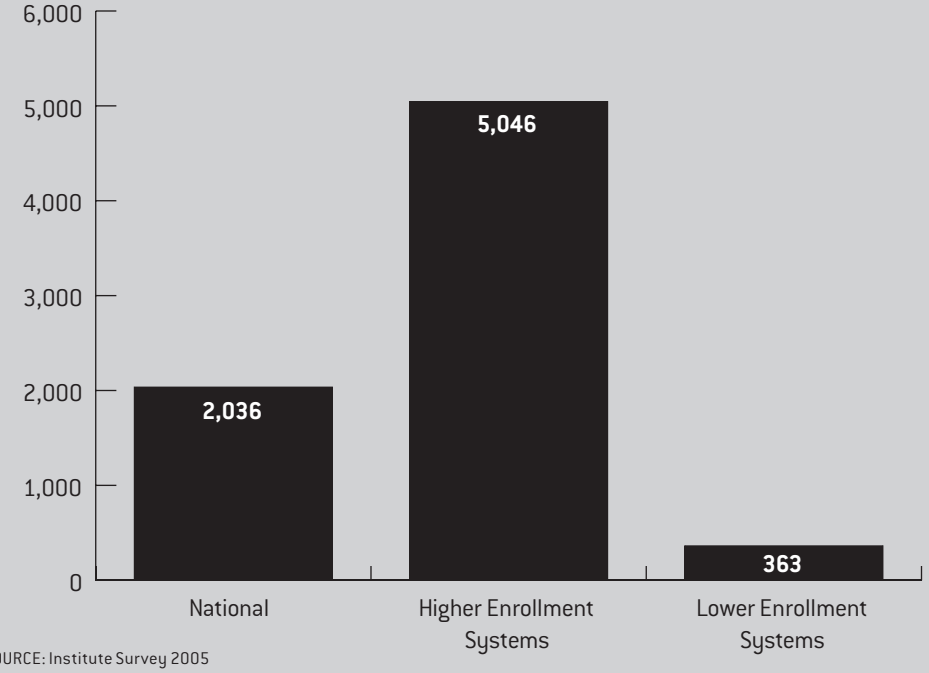
During 2003-04, there were at least 85,491 prisoners enrolled in postsecondary education in the prison systems that responded to the survey.[10] This number represents almost 5 percent of the total number of prisoners incarcerated in those systems during 2003, a number comparable to the percentage of prisoners enrolled in college courses before the loss of the Pell Grants (Ryan & Woodard 1987). However, 89 percent of all postsecondary enrollments among prisoners came from the higher-enrollment prison systems, despite the fact that those systems incarcerated only 66 percent of the total prison population nationwide. There was also substantial variation between the average enrollments in the higher- and lower-enrollment prison systems. While the higher-enrollment systems enrolled an average of 5,046 prisoners in postsecondary correctional education during 2003-04, the lower-enrollment systems enrolled only 363 prisoners on average (Figure 4). Some of this variation in enrollment is likely due to economies of scale—once a certain critical mass has been reached, enrolling each subsequent prisoner becomes less expensive.

Of course, not every prisoner is eligible for postsecondary education. According to a Bureau of Justice Statistics report, only 60 percent of state and 73 percent of federal prisoners have the requisite education—at least a GED or high school diploma (Harlow 2003). While educational attainment varies significantly among prison systems, the results of this survey suggest that around 11 percent of the *eligible* prison population actually participated in postsecondary correctional education nationwide in 2003-04. Once again, variation existed between the higher-enrollment and lower-enrollment prison systems. Whereas the higher-enrollment systems provided postsecondary correctional education to 14 percent of their eligible populations, only 4 percent of eligible prisoners received postsecondary correctional education in lower-enrollment systems.

The issue of correspondence courses also bears mention. Because correspondence courses are typically paid for by the prisoners themselves, many states do not track such enrollments. As a result, there were undoubtedly prisoners enrolled in college courses via correspondence who were not counted in the totals above. There is, however, a

[10] Two state prison systems, Idaho and Michigan, reported that they offered postsecondary correctional education to some prisoners but were unable to give the total number of participants. As a result, they have been excluded from any discussions of enrollment and from analyses based on the higher- and lower-enrollment prison systems.

Figure 4: Average number of prisoners enrolled in postsecondary correctional education programs, 2003-04



SOURCE: Institute Survey 2005

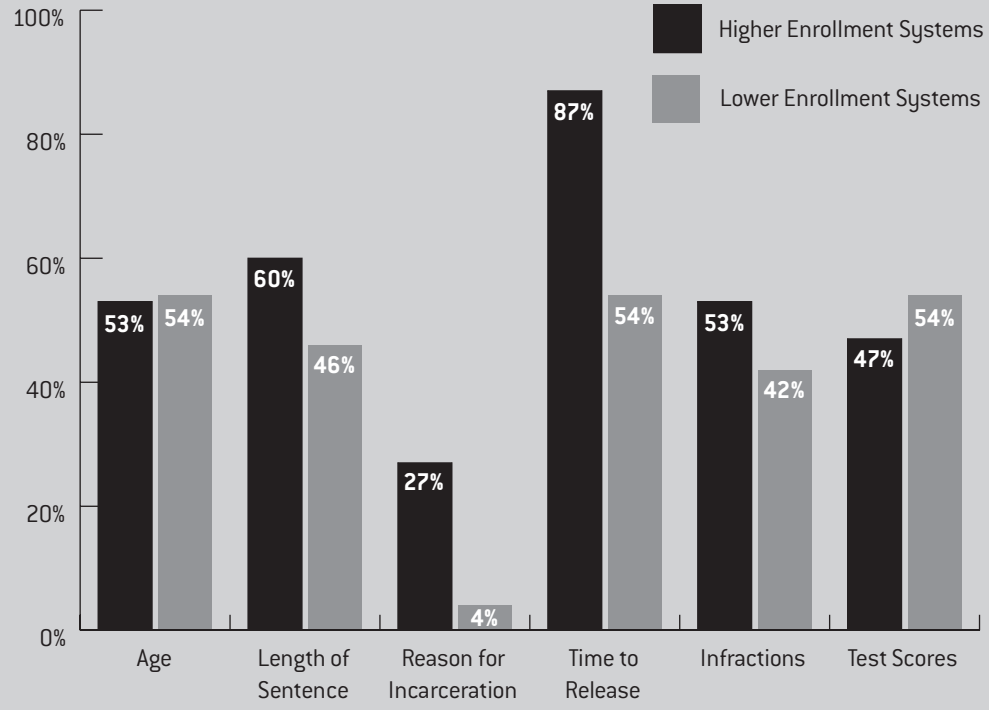
difference between higher- and lower-enrollment states when it comes to how they handle correspondence courses. While 64 percent of higher-enrollment states reported having a formal policy that outlines how prisoners may access a correspondence course, only 44 percent of lower-enrollment states have such policies. In many of these cases, the decision is left to the discretion of the warden of each correctional facility, who may decide not to allow enrollment in correspondence courses.

Eligibility requirements

Many prison systems consider various eligibility factors, in addition to the high school or GED credential, before allowing prisoners to enroll in postsecondary education. Some of these factors are mandated by the funding that states may use to pay for their postsecondary correctional education programs. The federal Incarcerated Youth Offender grants, for example, are only designed to provide postsecondary programming to prisoners age 25 or younger who are within five years of release from prison. In addition, the use of eligibility requirements such as length of time to release demonstrates a prison system's commitment to those inmates most likely to benefit from postsecondary educational opportunities, often a crucial factor when justifying the expense of these programs to policymakers and the public.

The higher-enrollment prison systems, in particular, reported that they consider a variety of eligibility criteria in addition to educational achievement. With the exception of the prisoner's age and placement test scores, the higher-enrollment systems were more likely

Figure 5: Percentage of prison systems using various factors to determine prisoner eligibility for postsecondary correctional education, 2003-04



NOTE: Respondents could give multiple answers.
SOURCE: Institute Survey 2005

than the lower-enrollment systems to consider all of the factors affecting eligibility listed on the Institute survey: length of sentence, reason for incarceration, length of time until release, and infractions committed while incarcerated (Figure 5). In some cases, the difference was quite substantial—87 percent of the higher-enrollment systems indicated that they consider the length of time to release when permitting prisoners to enroll in postsecondary education, compared to 54 percent of the lower-enrollment systems. Likewise, 27 percent of the higher-enrollment systems considered the reason for incarceration, while only 4 percent of the lower-enrollment systems did so. These numbers seem to indicate that carefully controlling who enrolls in postsecondary education allows certain prison systems to provide postsecondary education to more prisoners and, perhaps even more importantly, to help ensure that these prisoners are able to complete their certificate or degree programs.

Degree programs and completions

Data from the Institute survey show that, while the percentage of prisoners enrolled in postsecondary education has rebounded to its pre-1994 level, the types of programs available to prisoners has shifted, with the majority of those enrolled in postsecondary programs now taking vocational, rather than purely academic, courses (Box 3).

BOX 3: VOCATIONAL OR ACADEMIC EDUCATION?

The debate about academic versus vocational programming for prisoners is an important one. Intuitively, vocational courses hold some appeal: they often take less time to complete than academic courses of study, and they offer work-related skills that prisoners may use immediately upon release. These qualities make vocational courses more palatable to legislators who must justify offering higher education to prisoners.

The question that remains, however, is whether vocational education offers the same benefits as more traditional academic work. Some research suggests that, while vocational training programs such as apprenticeships reduce recidivism, they do so less effectively than traditional postsecondary education programs (Batiuk et al 2005). Most such studies, however, focus only on non-credit vocational training, a type of programming that often does not require a high school diploma or GED. Vocational courses for college credit are typically lumped in with other postsecondary work, making it impossible to assess any differences in outcomes between postsecondary academic programs and postsecondary vocational programs.

On the other hand, research on populations other than prisoners does provide some evidence that for-credit vocational education may be of value to formerly incarcerated people. A California study of welfare recipients who attended community college found, for example, that students who completed vocational certificates or associate's degree programs were more likely to find employment in their first two years after graduation than were students in more traditional academic programs. This study also found that graduates with vocational associate's degrees earned more than students with traditional academic degrees, and vocational certificate holders earned just as much as those with non-vocational associate's degrees (Mathur et al 2004). While some of the high-wage vocational programs available to the participants in this study, such as nursing, cannot be offered to prisoners for security reasons, others, including business degrees, are among the for-credit vocational programs typically offered in prisons. Given the strong connection between post-release employment and reduced recidivism, the California study suggests that for-credit vocational programs may be a good fit for postsecondary correctional education.

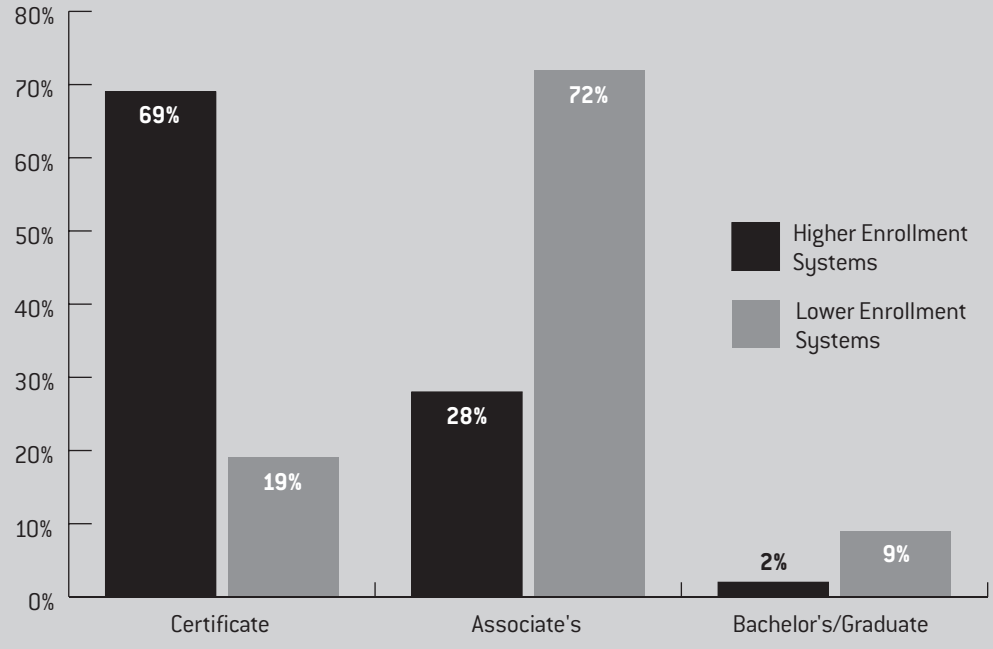
Degree and certificate programs

Almost two-thirds of prisoners enrolled in postsecondary correctional education as of 2003-04 were enrolled in for-credit vocational certificate programs.[11] The remaining prisoners taking college classes were, for the most part, enrolled in associate's degree programs. Only 3 percent of prisoners nationwide were enrolled in programs that would lead to either a bachelor's or a graduate degree. These numbers help counter the perception that prisoners are being rewarded for their crimes with the opportunity to earn high-level college degrees. Rather, the postsecondary programs offered to prisoners are generally those that will aid their re-entry into society by providing them with enhanced work skills.

As might be expected, the higher-enrollment prison systems were responsible for the general patterns in this data. In fact, two-thirds of these higher-enrollment prison systems enrolled at least 75 percent of their postsecondary correctional education participants

[11] Many prison systems offer vocational training programs for which incarcerated students receive professional certifications recognized by employers rather than college credit. Some of these programs require that participants hold a high school diploma or college degree. For the purposes of this report, however, only courses taken for college credit were considered postsecondary education.

Figure 6: Distribution of prisoners enrolled in postsecondary correctional education programs by degree type, 2003-04



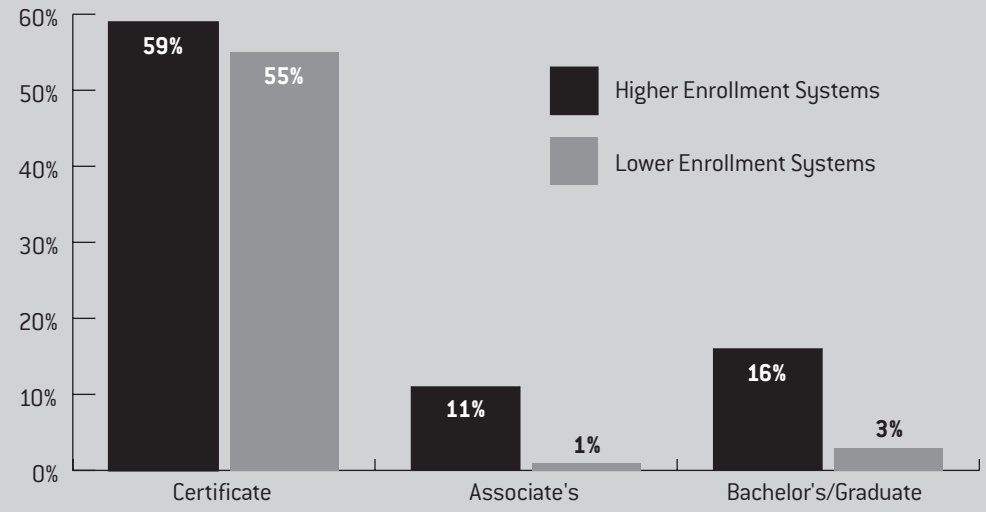
SOURCE: Institute Survey 2005

in vocational certificate programs in 2003-04. The lower-enrollment systems displayed substantially different results. These prison systems enrolled the majority (72 percent) of their incarcerated students in associate's degree programs. They also enrolled a greater percentage of prisoners in bachelor's degree programs compared to the higher-enrollment systems (Figure 6). This finding suggests that one reason the higher-enrollment prison systems are able to enroll so many more students is that they focus on short-term vocational certificate programs. This conclusion is supported by the data from states such as Washington and Colorado, which enrolled a significant percentage of eligible prisoners in postsecondary programs, despite the smaller size of their prison systems. However, these two states enrolled the vast majority of their incarcerated students in vocational certificate programs.

Degree and certificate completions

While most of the prison systems responding to the Institute survey allow prisoners to earn a degree while incarcerated, the rate of completions was quite low. For example, slightly more than 8 percent of the prisoners enrolled in associate's degree programs completed their degree during the 2003-04 academic year. The completion rate was much higher for vocational certificates, with 59 percent of prisoners enrolled in these programs completing a credential. This finding is most likely attributable to the short duration of certificate programs, compared to the lengthy time required to complete most degree programs, a particular problem for prisoners who usually must attend college part-time and who face many additional obstacles to amassing enough credits to earn a degree.

Figure 7: Postsecondary correctional education completion rates by degree type, 2003-04



SOURCE: Institute Survey 2005

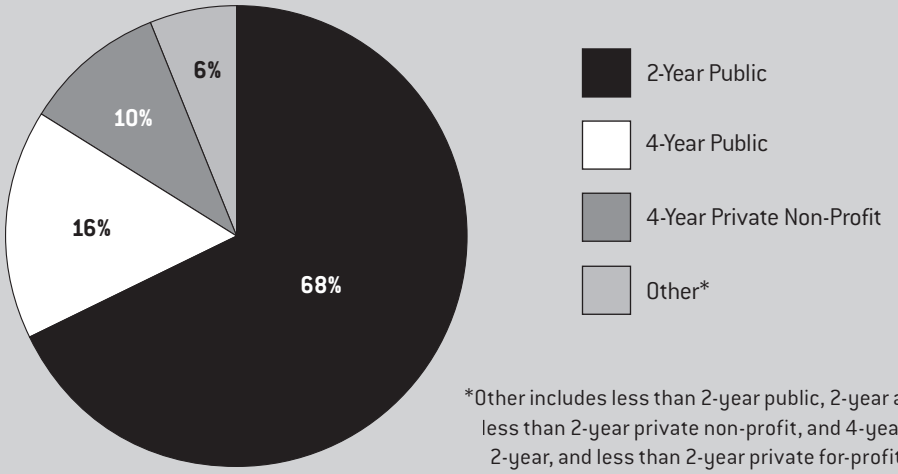
In 2003-04, inmates in the prison systems responding to this survey were awarded 2,191 college degrees and 24,627 certificates. The higher-enrollment prison systems accounted for the vast majority of degree completions—96 percent of all degrees and certificates awarded. This finding can, in part, be attributed to significantly higher enrollments in vocational certificate programs in these systems. However, these systems also had higher completion rates in all program types than did the lower-enrollment systems. For example, only slightly more than 1 percent of incarcerated students in lower-enrollment prison systems completed associate's degrees in 2003-04 versus 11 percent in the higher-enrollment systems (Figure 7).

In responding to the survey, a number of correctional educators discussed the low completion rates for incarcerated students in their postsecondary programs. Often this situation is due to factors beyond the control of educators, including the fact that in many prison systems inmates must work to earn money to pay for essentials such as shampoo or toothpaste and may therefore drop out of educational programs that interfere with work assignments. In addition, degree and certificate completions are hindered in some prison systems by policies that lead to frequent transfers between correctional facilities and by the release of prisoners prior to completion of a degree or certificate program.

Sources and means of instruction

The Institute survey is the first in recent years to ask which institutions provide the instruction for postsecondary correctional education, and responses indicated that the vast majority of prisoners receive instruction from public two-year institutions—community colleges (Figure 8). Indeed, in an unduplicated count, 68 percent of the 291 institutions providing postsecondary correctional education in the United States during 2003-04 were

Figure 8: Distribution of institutions providing postsecondary instruction to prisoners, 2003-04



SOURCE: Institute Survey 2005

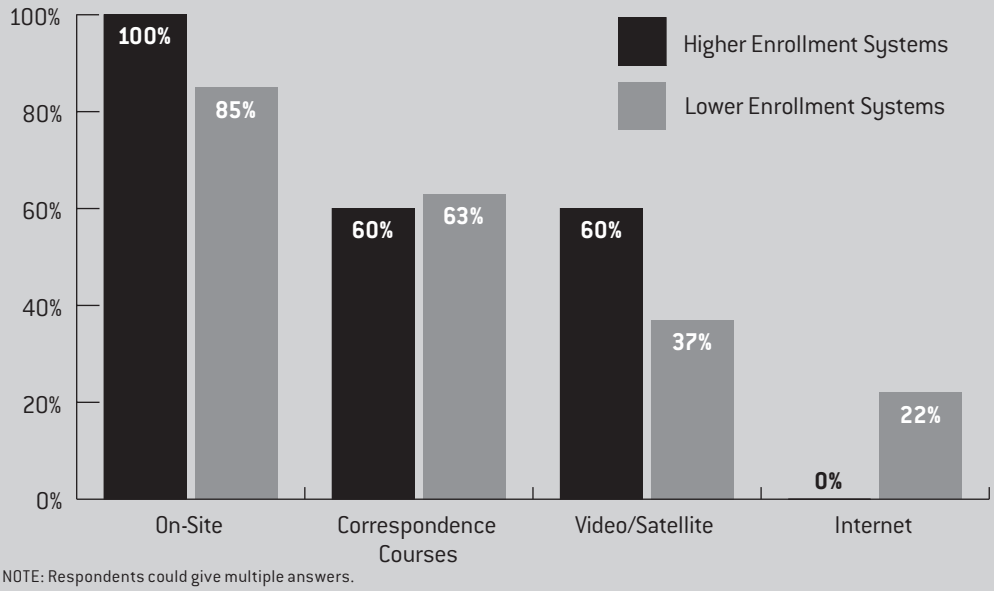
community colleges.[12] The next largest group of providers—16 percent—was public four-year institutions. Private, nonprofit, four-year institutions represented only 10 percent of the institutions providing postsecondary correctional education, and several of these were schools such as Ohio University and Brigham Young University that offer well-known and extensive correspondence programs. Moreover, very few for-profit institutions, only 4 percent of the total, provided instruction for postsecondary correctional education.[13] This finding stands in direct opposition to the perception that correctional education benefits proprietary institutions at taxpayers' expense, a situation that has been a problem in the past but now seems to have been rectified.

In this age of technology, it seems reasonable to expect a significant use of the Internet and other such resources for postsecondary instruction in correctional facilities. However, survey respondents indicated that more traditional instructional methods are generally utilized. For example, 91 percent of responding prison systems reported that on-site instruction was used to teach postsecondary courses while 45 percent used video or satellite instruction for at least some of their classes. Internet technology was the least frequently used—correctional educators consistently cited security concerns when discussing why their prison systems do not use this technology. Nonetheless, the potential for Internet instruction in postsecondary correctional education still remains. New Mexico, for example, has developed an Internet-based, distance-education program that uses a secure network connection, and if this program continues to prove effective, it may be adopted in other prison systems.

[12]Survey respondents were asked to list all institutions providing instruction for their prison systems. Some institutions serve more than one system through distance education or correspondence courses.

[13] By comparison, among postsecondary institutions receiving Title IV federal student aid in 2003, 22 percent were public two-year schools, 10 percent were public four-year schools, 24 percent were private non-profit four-year schools, and fully 38 percent were private for-profit schools (U.S. Dept. of Education 2003).

Figure 9: Percentage of prison systems using various means of instruction for postsecondary correctional education, 2003-04



NOTE: Respondents could give multiple answers.
SOURCE: Institute Survey 2005

Notably, the higher enrollment prison systems were most likely to use traditional instructional methods (Figure 9). All of them offered on-site instruction in at least some of their correctional facilities and a majority also offered video or satellite instruction. Moreover, none of them offered Internet-based instructional options. This situation may be attributed to a critical mass factor. If enough prisoners are enrolled in postsecondary education, it becomes cost-effective to bring instructors into the correctional facility. Lower-enrollment states, on the other hand, may be willing to experiment with Internet-based instruction if it will allow increased enrollments.

Funding sources

Funding for postsecondary correctional education in 2003-04 came from a number of sources, which varied considerably among the state prison systems.[14] The most common source of funding, by far, was the federal Incarcerated Youth Offender (IYO) grants, mentioned as a source of funding by 83 percent of states responding and as the postsecondary program's primary source of funding (more than half of all funds) by 42 percent. Another widely used source of funding was self-payment by prisoners—used in at least 56 percent of states (some do not track self-funded courses). State appropriations also were used to fund programs in 47 percent of states. Survey respondents from several states that do not receive state funds noted that they are, in fact, forbidden by law to use state monies to fund postsecondary educational opportunities for prisoners.

[14] The Federal Bureau of Prisons, the budget for which is entirely funded by congressional appropriation, is not included in this discussion. In addition, seven states that offer postsecondary correctional education programs were unable to provide a breakdown of how these programs were funded and are not included in this analysis.

In an effort to obtain funding for postsecondary correctional education programs, states have turned to a variety of less common funding sources. A number of state prison systems reported receiving federal funding in addition to the Incarcerated Youth Offender grant. In particular, several states noted that they used money provided by the Carl D. Perkins Vocational-Technical Education Act to fund postsecondary vocational programs. Some prison systems also have found supplemental sources of state and local funding. Oklahoma, for example, funded some Native American prisoners with Tribal Council grants while Texas allowed prisoners to benefit from Texas Public Education Grants and from the Hazlewood Act, which waives tuition and some fees at public colleges and universities for Texas military veterans. Many states also provided formula funding to public colleges and universities based on the number of incarcerated students they served.

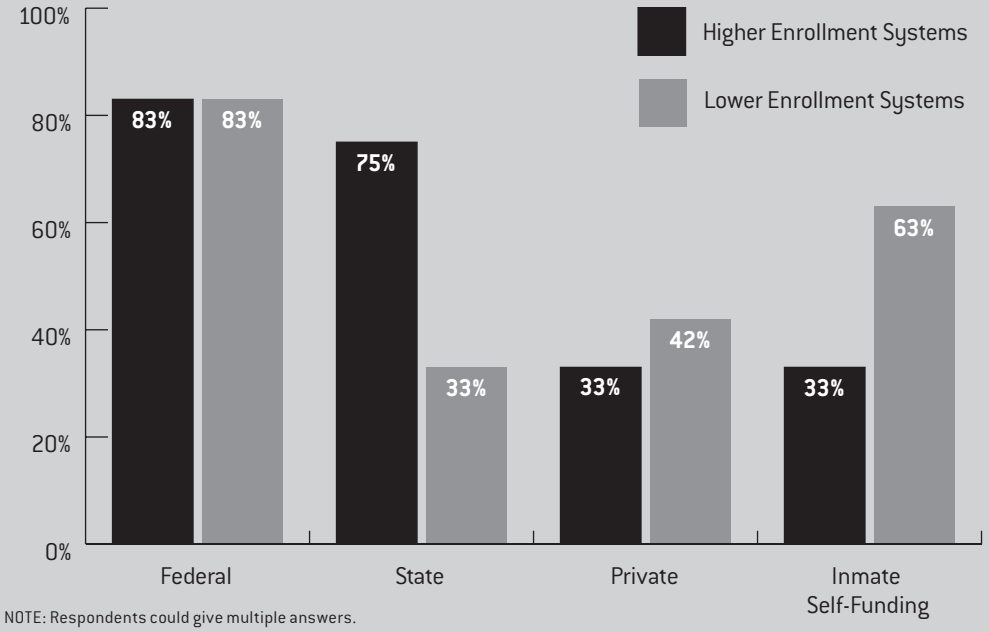
In other states, private funds were an important source of revenue—39 percent of states reported some use of either private donations or scholarships sponsored by the colleges that provided instruction for postsecondary correctional education. Massachusetts's entire postsecondary correctional education program, for example, was funded by Boston University. In Virginia and other states, private scholarship funds have been established using individual donations to help cover costs for prisoners taking college classes. Oregon and Minnesota have taken the idea of private funding a step further and created private nonprofit foundations that raise money to support postsecondary correctional education programs in the state.

Although federal IYO grants were the funding source most often mentioned by both higher- and lower-enrollment state prison systems, there were some significant variations in funding sources between the two groups. While 75 percent of higher-enrollment systems mentioned state appropriations as a source of funding, only 33 percent of lower-enrollment systems did so. Conversely, 63 percent of the lower-enrollment systems relied on at least some self-funding by prisoners. Only 33 percent of higher-enrollment states asked prisoners to pay a portion of the cost of their education while incarcerated—although Texas requires its prisoners to reimburse the state for the cost of their education after release from prison (Figure 10).

These variations become even more apparent when each state's primary source of funds for postsecondary correctional education programs is examined. Among the higher-enrollment states, two-thirds received at least half their funding from state appropriations, a figure that did not include any formula funding paid directly to the postsecondary institutions providing instruction for these programs. Only 17 percent of lower-enrollment states were able to use state appropriations as their primary funding source. On the other hand, 50 percent of lower-enrollment states relied on federal IYO grants to provide more than half their postsecondary funding versus only 25 percent of higher-enrollment states. Reliance on IYO funding, of course, severely limits the number of prisoners a state can serve because of eligibility restrictions, and funding for these grants is also subject to annual review by Congress.

These variations in funding between higher- and lower-enrollment states emphasize the importance of state support in achieving higher levels of enrollment in postsecondary correctional education. Substantial state funding for these programs allows higher-enrollment prison systems to provide an education for prisoners who may not have

Figure 10: Percentage of state prison systems using various funding sources for postsecondary correctional education, 2003-04



NOTE: Respondents could give multiple answers.
SOURCE: Institute Survey 2005

sufficient money to fund it themselves and to enroll older prisoners who are not eligible for federal Incarcerated Youth Offender funding. State support also allows for the creation of innovative programs like New Mexico's distance-learning initiative, which would not have been possible without the state commitment to funding higher education for prisoners.

Key findings

The results of the Institute survey offer hope that postsecondary correctional education has survived the loss of the Pell Grants a decade ago. The percentage of prisoners enrolled in postsecondary correctional education programs has returned to the levels found before eligibility for the Pell Grants was eliminated, and because of significant growth in the prison population, the actual number of incarcerated men and women taking college-level classes during 2003-04 was substantially higher than in the years leading up to 1994.

Nonetheless, these findings still indicate that postsecondary correctional education was available to only 5 percent of the prison population in 2003-04. In addition, the 15 higher-enrollment prison systems identified by the survey enrolled 89 percent of incarcerated students and awarded 96 percent of the degrees and certificates granted to prisoners nationwide. These higher-enrollment systems achieved their successes in part through economies of scale, and strong state support for postsecondary correctional education programs was also an important factor.

Another key finding is the fact that a majority of prisoners who took college classes in 2003-04, and an even larger percentage of those who earned a credential, were participating in vocational coursework for college credit. While these programs may, in fact, be particularly valuable in ensuring that prisoners would be able to find employment after release, it is worth noting that prison inmates are not earning college degrees, even at the associate's level, in any significant numbers. The benefits of postsecondary education that increase with higher degrees still may remain out of reach of many formerly incarcerated people.

CHAPTER 4:

Funding Postsecondary Correctional Education

As the previous chapter demonstrates, there is some good news about the availability of postsecondary correctional education in the United States. The fact remains, however, that only around 11 percent of prisoners who hold a high school diploma or GED were enrolled in college-level classes in 2003-04.[15] One of the principal causes of this low enrollment level, as mentioned by nearly every survey respondent, is lack of funding. Funding for all prison programming is severely limited, as states must pay not only for incarcerating a growing prison population, but also for the escalating costs of education and health care (Stephan 2004). In many prison systems, the limited dollars available for educational programs are spent on Adult Basic Education and GED preparation classes, on the theory that the most poorly educated prisoners will benefit most from some education (Spangenberg 2004). Even in those prison systems that have recognized the value of postsecondary correctional education in reducing recidivism and preparing formerly incarcerated people for re-entry into society, the funds to implement such programs may simply not be available.

Federal funding

Since 1998, the federal Incarcerated Youth Offender (IYO) block grants have been a key source of funding for postsecondary correctional education programs in many states, especially those with smaller prison populations. However, the grant's restrictions limit its usefulness in some states. Massachusetts, for example, has found it difficult to use IYO grant money to develop a cost-effective on-site postsecondary program because prisoners who meet the eligibility requirements (age 25 or younger, holding a high school diploma or GED, and within five years of release) are spread throughout the state's correctional facilities. Another problem mentioned by survey respondents is the grant's annual cap on the amount states can spend per student, which limits the number of courses each incarcerated student can take during the year and thus significantly increases the time it takes to complete a degree or certificate.

The age limit for the IYO program creates particular problems for correctional educators in the state prison systems. Survey respondents frequently noted that incarcerated students are often just getting started on their degree programs when they "age out" of IYO

[15] Unless otherwise noted, all data in this chapter and the next come either from interviews with correctional educators or from the survey of correctional education administrators conducted by the Institute for Higher Education Policy and described in the previous chapter.

eligibility. A number of correctional educators also commented that older prisoners would make better candidates for this funding in any case because they tend to be more mature and focused, less likely to withdraw from classes, and more intent on improving their situation after release from prison. Allowing older students to be funded by the IYO grants would also assist those prisoners who earn a GED while incarcerated or who must take remedial courses in preparation for college-level work by giving them time to complete a postsecondary program.

States that rely on IYO funding for their postsecondary correctional education programs are also in a precarious position because the program must be reauthorized by Congress each year. This year, Senator Arlen Specter, the primary congressional advocate for this program, is seeking to use the reauthorization process to address some of the concerns raised by correctional educators. In July 2005, Senator Specter introduced a bill reauthorizing the IYO program, extending its age limit to 35 years and younger, and increasing the annual per-student spending cap. As of October 2005, this bill had not yet been considered by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. However, the change in the age limit—although not the change to the per student spending cap—was included in the Higher Education Amendments bill passed by that committee in September 2005 (Library of Congress 2005).

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An additional source of federal aid used by some states is the Carl D. Perkins Vocational–Technical Education Act, a program that provides block grants to states in support of vocational programs for both youth and adults. Perkins funds are allocated to state vocational education agencies for distribution to secondary and postsecondary schools and other state institutions that offer vocational training. Vocational correctional education programs are eligible to apply for a share of this aid, but states may only use up to 1 percent of their total Perkins allocation for aid to correctional facilities, severely limiting the funds available for vocational programs in prisons. Prior to the 1998 reauthorization of the Perkins Act, states were actually *required* to spend at least that 1 percent of their allocation on institutional programs, but they are now prevented from spending any additional funds beyond that amount (Spangenberg 2004). The Perkins Act is due for reauthorization by the 109th Congress, and the version of the reauthorization bill passed by the House and under consideration by the Senate as of October 2005 maintains this 1 percent ceiling (Library of Congress 2005).

The debate around providing Pell Grants to prisoners is a central issue in considering federal funding for postsecondary correctional education. The elimination of prisoner eligibility for Pell Grants in 1994 was a severe blow to postsecondary correctional education programs nationwide, and many advocates of higher education for prisoners have focused their efforts on reinstating this funding. Dallas Pell, daughter of Senator Claiborne Pell, for whom the Pell Grants were named, leads the Pell Grants for Public Safety Initiative, a group that advocates restoration of the grants to the incarcerated (Martin 2005). The prisoner advocacy group CURE (Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants) has also proposed amending the Higher Education Act to reinstate prisoner eligibility for Pell Grants (CURE-NY 2005). Despite these advocacy

efforts, little progress has been made as yet, and the question remains whether efforts to reinstate the Pell Grants are the most effective use of advocacy resources.

In the 40 years since the initial passage of the Higher Education Act, the federal government has taken a key role in ensuring broad access to postsecondary education in the United States. Given that the prison population is dominated by young men, racial and ethnic minorities, and the economically disadvantaged—groups already underrepresented in American colleges and universities—it does seem entirely reasonable to allow prisoners access to Pell Grants and other forms of federal student aid. In fact, individuals held in local jails or half-way houses or sentenced to home or weekend-only detention are eligible for federal student aid. Only those men and women incarcerated in state and federal prisons have been ruled ineligible, a policy that leads to a disparate negative impact on the students who most need this aid. Research suggesting that higher education for prisoners reduces recidivism and improves the likelihood of successful re-entry into society after release adds additional weight to the argument that prisoners should be eligible for Pell Grants.

. . . it does seem entirely reasonable to allow prisoners access to Pell Grants and other forms of federal student aid.

On the other hand, the current emphasis on cost-cutting to reduce the federal budget deficit, as well as the continued importance of "tough-on-crime" political stances, makes it seem unlikely that Congress will consider expanding the Pell Grant program to once again include prisoners. In July 2005, for example, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce rejected an amendment to the College Access and Opportunity Act that would have restored eligibility for federal student aid for individuals convicted of drug possession or sale (Sen 2005). This situation suggests that it may be time for advocates of postsecondary correctional education to extend their efforts in other directions, including expanding the Incarcerated Youth Offender grant program and encouraging state legislators to implement or increase funding for postsecondary correctional educational programs in their state prison systems.

Private funding

The lack of federal funds for postsecondary correctional education has led state prison systems to explore other options, including private funding. In some states, turning to private funding is a necessity because of statutory constraints on the use of state funds for educating prisoners. For example, as of 2003, Minnesota ended state support for higher education programs in its prisons. Other states allow state funding for such programs but only with restrictions. In Washington, the state will fund a single one-year postsecondary vocational certificate program for each prisoner. Further postsecondary education, whether vocational or academic, must be privately funded. In this sort of legislative environment, private funding becomes a crucial means of funding postsecondary programs for prisoners.

Prisoner self-funding

The most common form of private funding comes from prisoners themselves or from their families, many of whom are unwilling or unable to provide much financial support

to the prisoner. In most prison systems, inmates with sufficient funds to cover tuition, fees, and postage can take postsecondary correspondence courses. Because many prison systems do not keep records of inmates who are taking correspondence courses, it is difficult to know the full extent to which prisoners are self-funding their higher education. It is worth noting, however, that correspondence courses can be relatively expensive. The Ohio University College Program for the Incarcerated, for example, as of 2005-06 charges $1,062 per semester—inclusive of tuition, textbooks and supplies, and postage—for a prisoner to enroll in two correspondence courses (Ohio University 2005). Some prison systems also use self-payments by prisoners to supplement state and federal funding for on-site higher education programs. In Virginia, inmates who can afford the cost of tuition and fees may enroll in the college courses offered on-site for prisoners who are funded by the Incarcerated Youth Offender grant. In some cases, states make such courses available at relatively low cost. Utah, for example, charges prisoners not funded by IYO grants approximately $100 per semester for tuition and fees.

An argument can be made that requiring prisoners to cover the cost of their higher education is only fair. After all, they would have to pay for college if they were not incarcerated. Paying the full cost of college tuition and fees, however, is well beyond the means of most prisoners. Wages for prison work vary significantly from state to state but are typically quite low. As of 1997, almost three-quarters of prisoners reported having a work assignment, either at the correctional facility or outside of it, but only 68 percent of these prisoners—50 percent of all prisoners—were paid for their work. Wages were typically below one dollar per hour with a median wage of 30 cents per hour, and prisoners worked, on average, 28 hours each week. At this rate, the prisoners who earned any income at all received approximately $8.40 per week or $33.60 per month. Prisoners who were paid by the month reported only slightly higher wages—$42 per month on average (U.S. Dept. of Justice 2001).

Even at a lower-cost community college, this amount of money would not go very far, and educational costs are not the only expenses for which prisoners may be responsible. As of 2002, 53 percent of U.S. prison systems charged inmates for room and board while 71 percent charged fees for medical services. Prisoners may also be required to pay for clothing, phone calls and postage, books or magazines, food purchased from the prison canteen, and in some states, toiletries such as shampoo or toothpaste. These costs are typically lower than those outside the correctional setting—medical fees, for example, ranged from 50 cents to $5 per visit as of 2002—but basic expenses still consume a substantial portion of the money earned by prisoners (American Correctional Association 2002).

Donations

Because of limitations on both public funding and prisoner self-funding, a number of prison systems have turned to private donors to help support postsecondary correctional educational programs. In Texas, for example, donors interested in helping prisoners gain access to higher education, including corporate donors and advocacy groups, have created scholarships through some of the public colleges and universities that provide postsecondary instruction in the state's prison system. Virginia has two private nonprofit scholarship funds that cover the cost of tuition, fees, and textbooks for some inmates taking college courses. One program is sponsored by the estate of a physician who was

incarcerated as a youth, and the other is funded by a foundation named for the first warden at the Virginia Correctional Center for Women.

While most private funding sources are too limited to support the creation of new postsecondary correctional education programs, as opposed to simply funding additional students in already established programs, there may be potential in more active fundraising efforts. In Oregon, for example, a private foundation called New Directions funds 26 percent of the state's incarcerated college students, using funds donated by individuals, businesses, and a local community college. Minnesota has also moved in this direction in recent years (Box 4).

BOX 4: PRIVATE FUNDING FOR POSTSECONDARY CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION

In 2003, the Minnesota state legislature ended state funding for all academic postsecondary correctional education programs in the state. While the Minnesota Department of Corrections has continued to maintain a vocational postsecondary correctional education program, funded by the state and by a federal Incarcerated Youth Offender grant, this action resulted in the elimination of a number of college programs in the state's prisons. The legislature's action also, however, led to the creation of the Minnesota Correctional Education Foundation, described on its website as "a statewide charity to establish, fund, and coordinate college and vocational opportunities at state correctional facilities." This new foundation, which hopes to revive higher education for prisoners in Minnesota, is based on the belief that postsecondary education is a crucial means of helping prisoners develop into productive citizens upon re-entry into their communities.

The central goal of this private, nonprofit foundation is to raise sufficient funds to offer postsecondary courses, leading to associate's degrees, to 350 or more prisoners at five correctional facilities each year. Early fundraising efforts have met with a good response from individual donors, including some able to make substantial gifts to the foundation, but have been less well received by major charities, many of which do not support higher education for prisoners. As a result, the foundation's leaders have come to realize that a secondary goal for the foundation must be to educate philanthropists and the public about the value of postsecondary correctional education.

Starting in Fall 2005, postsecondary courses funded by the foundation will be offered at two Minnesota prisons. Content and instructors for these courses will be provided by the newly created Correctional Higher Education Consortium, but the program as a whole will be coordinated by Inver Hills Community College, which also will be the degree-granting institution. Several of the colleges in the consortium are private, nonprofit institutions and will be able to donate some of the costs of instruction. Each course offered by the program will be compatible with the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum so that prisoners who do not complete a degree while incarcerated can transfer their credits to a college after release.

One of the most crucial factors in developing this foundation has been the close partnerships established with the Department of Corrections and the Correctional Higher Education Consortium. The state Commissioner of Corrections and the President of Inver Hills Community College are both members of the foundation's board of directors, as are a number of business leaders and the CEO of MINCORR, the state's prison industries group, all of whom can offer advice about Minnesota's workforce needs. The intent of this public-private partnership is to strengthen postsecondary correctional education in Minnesota by diversifying available funding, providing high quality educational programs in the state's prisons, and above all, by creating an ongoing and sustainable source of support for higher education for prisoners.

State funding

Private funding, while valuable as a supplement to public funding, is unlikely to be sufficient to fully fund a large postsecondary correctional education program. State funding, on the other hand, seems to be essential to the success of such programs. State funding can, in fact, be seen as a proxy for overall state support for postsecondary correctional education. The states that adequately fund postsecondary programs in their prisons tend to also be the states that recognize the benefits such programs can have in reducing recidivism and saving money for the state's taxpayers. In the Institute survey, for example, two-thirds of the state prison systems enrolling at least 1,000 prisoners in postsecondary programs reported getting more than half their funding from appropriations for the state corrections agency. Beyond direct appropriations, furthermore, states can support postsecondary correctional education by ensuring that public colleges and universities are able to include incarcerated students in any headcounts used for state formula funding and that incarcerated students are eligible for any state need-based financial aid.

The states that adequately fund postsecondary programs in their prisons tend to also be the states that recognize the benefits such programs can have in reducing recidivism and saving money for the state's taxpayers.

State need-based financial aid for college students can, in fact, be a vital source of funding for postsecondary correctional education. Most states offer such grants, and while some have followed the federal government in excluding incarcerated individuals from eligibility, many have not. In Texas, for example, nearly 5 percent of the annual funding for postsecondary correctional education comes from the Texas Public Education Grants. These grants, based solely on financial need, are provided to prisoners through the public colleges and universities that offer instruction in the state's prisons. Participation in this grant program, as with most other state need-based aid, requires completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), a complex form that can intimidate even those familiar with higher education. Moreover, since inmates of state and federal prisons are not eligible for federal student aid, they may not appreciate the need to fill out the FAFSA. In order to take advantage of state need-based aid, where available, prison systems must ensure that prisoners are aware of the FAFSA and have access to assistance in completing it. Prisons could, for example, hold FAFSA workshops prior to their state's priority deadline for need-based aid.

In Texas, some prisoners can also benefit from the Hazlewood Act, which offers exemptions from tuition and some fees at the state's public colleges and universities to honorably discharged veterans who were Texas residents at the time of their enlistment. These benefits for veterans provide nearly 6 percent of the funding for postsecondary education in Texas. Some incarcerated veterans are also eligible for education benefits through the Montgomery G.I. Bill or the Veterans Educational Assistance Program, federal programs that have not eliminated funding for prisoners, although such funds can only be used to pay for tuition, fees, and books. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that, as of 1998, there were more than 150,000 veterans incarcerated in state or federal prisons, 83 percent of whom had been honorably discharged and so could potentially be eligible for federal or state educational programs for veterans (Mumola 2000b). As in the case of state need-based grants, prison systems can benefit by making prisoners who are veterans aware

of the possibility of receiving funding and providing them with assistance in filing the correct paperwork.

One of the most effective ways to provide state support for postsecondary correctional education is to create partnerships between state corrections agencies and public colleges or universities. An excellent example of this type of partnership can be found in North Carolina, where long-term administrative and financial cooperation between the Department of Corrections and the North Carolina Community College System has led to a flourishing postsecondary correctional educational program. Similarly, in Nevada, community colleges provide tuition waivers for a third of the state's incarcerated students, enabling the state's prison system to meet minimum enrollment numbers needed to keep their postsecondary program operational. In this case, providing financial aid is beneficial to both the Department of Corrections and to the community colleges, all of which would lose funding opportunities if the postsecondary correctional educational program were forced to shut down. California is another state that has begun to explore the benefits of this sort of arrangement by establishing a partnership between the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and the California Community College System (Box 5).

Community colleges may, indeed, be a particularly valuable ally for correctional educators. Community colleges are typically found throughout the state, even in the geographically isolated areas in which prisons are often located, and many community colleges consider broad access to higher education a key part of their mission. Furthermore, community colleges with open-door admissions policies generally have considerable experience providing placement testing and remedial coursework for academically underprepared students, which makes them ideal instructional providers for prison systems where many students may need such assistance.

Since community colleges usually serve, and are often at least partially funded by, a local community, it may be difficult to persuade local residents that their tax dollars should be used to educate prison inmates. States can, however, counter such objections by providing formula funding to community colleges based on the number of incarcerated students the colleges serve and by explicitly including incarcerated students in statewide accountability reporting requirements for community colleges. In Texas, for example, incarcerated students are classified as a special population served by the state's community colleges, and the annual reports compiled by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board provide details on enrollment, remediation, and completions for all incarcerated students in the community college system. This accountability demonstrates the colleges' commitment to serve these students just as they serve other special populations such as the economically disadvantaged or those with limited English proficiency (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board 2004).

Future funding

The most important message to be found in the current funding of postsecondary correctional education programs is the importance of cultivating diverse funding sources. One of the reasons the loss of the Pell Grants in 1994 was so devastating is that some states relied solely on Pell money to fund their postsecondary correctional education programs. If

the federal Incarcerated Youth Offender grants were to be eliminated at some point in the near future, a number of states would find their college programs in similarly precarious positions. However, most of the states enrolling at least 1,000 prisoners in postsecondary programs would be able to continue these programs because IYO funds play only a part, and often quite a small part, in their overall budgets for correctional education. In fact, state funding may be even more important than federal funding because it reflects a commitment by state policymakers to postsecondary correctional education. Private funding also has a role to play and, as Minnesota's example shows, fundraising can be a

BOX 5: PARTNERSHIPS FOR POSTSECONDARY CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION

California, in the early 1980s, was one the nation's leaders in postsecondary correctional educational, enrolling more than 5 percent of its prisoners in postsecondary programs (Ryan & Woodard 1987). By 1995, however, all postsecondary correctional educational programs in the state had been eliminated—the victims of state budget cuts and the loss of the Pell Grants (Wees 1995). From 1996 to 2001, the only program offering higher education for prisoners in California was the Prison University Project, a nonprofit partnership between Patten University and San Quentin State Prison. The program was funded entirely by donations and relied on volunteer labor to provide on-site instruction leading to an associate's degree in liberal arts (Prison University Project 2005).

As recently as 2003-04, the situation remained problematic. California was able to enroll more than 4,200 prisoners (just over 1 percent of its total prison population) in postsecondary programs during the 2003-04 academic year, and 70 prisoners earned associate's degrees. However, nearly two-thirds of these incarcerated students were taking self-funded correspondence courses, and no direct state funding was available for postsecondary correctional education. Only three of the state's 109 community colleges were involved in providing instruction for postsecondary correctional education programs at four state prisons.

Today, all that is changing. As part of a statutory mandate requiring a new focus on rehabilitation, California's Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation has formed a partnership with the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office to bring affordable postsecondary correctional education to the state's prison system. Spring 2005 saw the addition of four new community college/prison partnerships with several more planned for the 2005-06 academic year. Coastline Community College enrolled 2,000 incarcerated students in 2005, a 300 percent increase over the previous year. Coastline also is initiating a pilot program that will bring college-level courses to nine California prisons in 2005-06, enrolling an additional 450 incarcerated students in the first semester alone. Much of the instruction for these programs will be provided through distance education, using both interactive and one-way satellite transmission of course content, supplemented by on-site visits from instructors and college counselors.

The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office has been a major source of financial support for this program. Incarcerated students are eligible for the Board of Governor's Fee Waivers, a need-based program available to California residents with incomes below $14,000 for one person, a qualification met by the vast majority of prisoners. Other state programs also may be sources of funding. Palo Verde College's program at the Ironwood and Chuckawalla Valley State Prisons, for example, uses funding from the Extended Opportunity Program and Services (EOPS), a state program intended to increase enrollment and retention of academically and economically challenged students, to cover the costs of textbooks and counseling services. This Palo Verde College postsecondary correctional education program, which has been in existence since 2001 and had 47 prisoners receive associate's degrees in May 2004, is the model used to develop new partnerships in California.

means of educating policymakers and the public about what postsecondary correctional education can do for the state.

Minnesota's idea of developing a foundation to fund postsecondary correctional education also demonstrates creative thinking to address the challenges of finding new funding sources. Prison systems in states such as California and Texas, which work in partnership with their state's public colleges and universities and make effective use of state need-based financial aid programs, reflect the sort of creative thinking that can lead to sustainable postsecondary correctional education programs. Prison reform advocates also have supplied creative ideas. One such advocate, Jon M. Taylor, himself a prison inmate who earned his degree while incarcerated, has suggested that prisoners be allowed to participate in the AmeriCorps community service program while incarcerated, substituting service work such as building houses for the poor or tutoring in their own prison's literacy or GED preparation programs for more traditional prison work assignments. Prisoners involved in this program would not receive a stipend for room and board from AmeriCorps, since theirs is already covered by the state, but would receive the educational grant offered for the completion of a successful term of community service (Taylor 2005). This sort of proposal opens new directions for thinking about how to fund higher education for prisoners.

CHAPTER 5:

Barriers to Accessing Postsecondary Correctional Education

The primary barrier preventing prisoners from gaining access to higher education is a serious lack of funding, as discussed in the previous chapter. Nonetheless, even when funding is available, other significant barriers remain that prevent prison systems from offering postsecondary correctional education to eligible prisoners. These barriers include the disadvantaged academic background of most prisoners, structural and institutional obstacles within prison systems that prevent prisoners from enrolling in and completing postsecondary programs, and opposition to postsecondary correctional education among policymakers and the public. Eliminating these often complex and deeply embedded barriers will require new and innovative policies at the state and institutional levels.

The need for remedial education

Correctional educators indicate that prisoners are, in general, very enthusiastic about getting a college education. For many prisoners, earning a postsecondary credential seems like a potentially life-changing opportunity with the promise of employment at decent wages after release. Unfortunately, however, many prisoners are not academically prepared for college-level courses. As previously noted, almost 40 percent of state prison inmates have not completed high school or earned a GED. As a result, in most prison systems, much of the funding available for educational programs is spent on Adult Basic Education and on GED preparation, leaving little extra for postsecondary courses.

Even among those prisoners who do have a high school diploma or GED, there is often substantial need for remediation, especially in English and math. In Texas, 29 percent of incarcerated first-time community college students in Fall 2002 required remediation (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board 2004). As of 2003-04, Hawaii reported that 63 percent of its inmates who hold a high school diploma or a GED had reading scores below the GED level on the Test of Adult Basic Education. In addition, as of 1997, 10 percent of prisoners nationwide reported having a learning disability, adding to the number of students who may need additional assistance (Harlow 2003). Some prison systems, especially those that rely on correspondence courses, simply require that prisoners be able to meet college-entrance requirements before being allowed to enroll, but such policies exclude many potential postsecondary students.

There is, of course, no easy solution to this problem. Incarcerated men and women represent a population that has largely been failed by the K-12 education system, and simple possession of a secondary credential does not mean that a prisoner is ready for postsecondary schooling. The situation does underscore the need for prison systems to test for learning disabilities and for academic readiness prior to enrollment in college-level classes, even when a potential student has the necessary secondary credential, and to offer remedial coursework, particularly in math and English, for those who are not yet ready for postsecondary education. Community colleges with open-access policies face similar challenges and make excellent partners in postsecondary correctional education. Prison systems that partner with community colleges can take advantage of existing testing and remediation strategies as a way to prepare prisoners for postsecondary work. The importance prisoners place on getting a college education helps ease this process. In New Mexico, where prisoners are required to demonstrate a 10th grade reading level before enrolling in college classes, the prospect of gaining access to postsecondary education has encouraged inmates to make the effort to complete necessary remedial work.

Prison systems that partner with community colleges can take advantage of existing testing and remediation strategies as a way to prepare prisoners for postsecondary work.

The challenges of delivering education in a prison

Offering higher education to prisoners requires an understanding of the complex circumstances of incarceration. Prisoners cannot, as a rule, leave the facility to attend classes; teachers must come to them, either directly or via distance-learning technology. Prisoners are also subject to innumerable restrictions that make taking classes a challenge. They usually cannot access the Internet, and if a library is available, they may only be able to visit it during certain limited hours. There may be restrictions on the number of books they can keep in their cells. Even spiral notebooks, a standard school supply for most college students, are often restricted because the metal binding could be used as a weapon.

Correctional educators also face unique challenges. If they teach on-site at a correctional facility, they must face a daily gauntlet of metal detectors and pat-downs to get to their classrooms. They must develop course content and assignments that accommodate the many restrictions placed on their students, and they must adjust to the fact that these students may miss class for a variety of reasons beyond their control, such as a parole hearing or a visit from an attorney. All of these complications, for staff and students alike, make it harder to deliver effective postsecondary correctional education and may, in fact, lead some to conclude that the results are not worth the difficulties.

Staff resentment

The complications of providing education in a prison setting can be significantly eased by supportive corrections staff. Such support is not, however, always available. Some staff members express resentment that prisoners are being offered the opportunity to attend college, an opportunity they may not have had themselves. Several Institute survey respondents indicated that uncooperative corrections staff members can obstruct postsecondary education programs, for example, by not releasing a prisoner from his cell

so that he can attend class or by confiscating a prisoner's textbooks. In 2003, a local chapter of the California Correctional Peace Officers Association undertook an active campaign to end state-funded postsecondary programs at two state prisons and was, in fact, able to persuade the warden at one facility to suspend the program (Warren 2003). Such actions on the part of corrections staff create a tension within the facility and make it even more difficult for postsecondary programs to continue.

One way to reduce resentment among corrections staff who object to the idea of prisoners receiving a college education while incarcerated is to make postsecondary educational programming available to them, as well as to prisoners. This approach, which makes use of already available instructors, textbooks, classrooms, and equipment, allows correctional facilities to offer low-cost professional development opportunities to staff members who can, in turn, use their new skills to function more effectively in the corrections environment (Taylor 1992). In New Mexico, for example, the computer labs used for distance-education programs are open to corrections staff at designated hours, and the state subsidizes their tuition and fees just as it does that of prisoners. As of yet, corrections staff members in New Mexico have not taken advantage of this opportunity, but in Arkansas, several staff members have enrolled in college courses through the program offered in its prison system.

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Logistics and security

For security reasons, prisons are often built in geographically isolated areas. As a result, a number of state correctional education coordinators indicated on their survey responses that they have trouble finding local colleges and universities with which to form partnerships. They also find it difficult to hire and retain qualified instructors for on-site programs. In Nevada, for example, a recent legislative requirement that all postsecondary instructors must hold master's degrees in their fields forced the removal of a number of experienced vocational instructors in the state's postsecondary correctional education program.

Security concerns are also a constant challenge for correctional educators. At any time, a correctional facility may initiate a "lock-down," a condition that means all prisoners are restricted to their housing units. Individual prisoners may be restricted in their movements because of disciplinary infractions or an upcoming hearing, preventing them from attending classes. Security concerns also lead prison administrators to ban a variety of equipment and substances that could be used as weapons or to manufacture drugs. Chemistry lab courses are, for example, nearly impossible to hold in a correctional facility.

One possible solution for many of the problems outlined above is a greater reliance on advances in educational technology. Using computer simulations of chemistry experiments might, for instance, make a lab course more feasible. Similarly, the use of distance education can reduce the need to bring instructors into a remote correctional facility. Some prison systems are already turning to distance learning for their

postsecondary programs. Of those responding to the Institute survey, 52 percent reported using some distance education, primarily video or satellite instruction. An expansion of these programs would be one way to offer more college classes to prisoners, provided that funding was made available.

In recent years, distance learning in mainstream higher education has come to rely heavily on the Internet as a means of disseminating course materials. This practice does not hold true for prisons, however. Only six state prison systems—14 percent of those responding to the survey—reported using Internet as a tool for postsecondary correctional education. The primary limitations on such programs involve security concerns. In many states, prisoners are forbidden to access the Internet, and administrators fear that prisoners would take advantage of Internet-based courses to engage in inappropriate or dangerous conduct. This limitation is a problem for survey respondents, several of whom noted that using available Internet technology to create secure distance education networks would enable them to provide relatively low-cost college classes for a larger number of students. At the moment, security concerns seem to outweigh this opportunity in most prison systems. The success of experiments with Internet-based classes in correctional facilities, such as the one currently underway in New Mexico (Box 6), provides hope that corrections officials will be more willing to try this technology in the future.

Overcrowding and transfers

At the end of 2003, 22 states and the federal prison system were operating at or above capacity, and an additional 20 state prison systems were near capacity (Harrison & Beck 2004). This overcrowding in correctional facilities has resulted in frequent involuntary transfers of prisoners. In Alaska and Hawaii, for example, prisoners are routinely transferred out of state due to space shortages. Washington state reported that, because of budget constraints, prisoners are transferred from higher-security to lower-security facilities as soon as they become eligible. These transfers can be very disruptive for a prisoner who is enrolled in a postsecondary education program. If the transfer occurs in the middle of a semester and the prisoner's new facility does not offer the same class, as is often the case, the prisoner will be forced to withdraw. Even in the case of correspondence students, the transfer may interrupt progress in completing the class, especially if the new facility has different policies on offering such courses.

In an effort to overcome this problem, some states have begun to develop policies and articulation agreements that will enable prisoners to move between correctional facilities without being forced to drop a course. In Washington, for example, prisoners are allowed to enroll in state-funded one-year vocational certificate programs, but program completions have been very low, in part because of involuntary transfers. The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, which administers the postsecondary correctional education program, has begun working with colleges to standardize curriculum and course materials so that prisoners who are transferred can continue their class in the new facility. This process has been a slow one, and only partially successful because inmates often are moved to prisons that do not offer the course in which they were previously enrolled. Nonetheless, the state has succeeded in standardizing its information technology and welding programs and is working to standardize others.

BOX 6: INTERNET-BASED DISTANCE EDUCATION

With only 6,223 prisoners as of December 2003 (Harrison & Beck 2004), New Mexico's demand for postsecondary correctional education is relatively small. As a result, correctional facilities were traditionally left to negotiate individual contracts with local community colleges to provide on-site postsecondary instruction. In 2001, however, corrections officials began to question this practice, citing problems with low course completion rates as well as difficulties maintaining programs in remote areas. Within a year, the New Mexico Department of Corrections had implemented an interactive distance education program in the state's prisons.

The Internet-based program delivers courses from Eastern New Mexico University-Roswell to nine New Mexico correctional facilities, each of which has been fitted with lab space, computers, and a secure, high-speed network connection to a computer server at the university. Prisoners enrolled in these classes are not able to actually access the Internet to send email or view external websites. Because security issues have been a major concern about this program, care has been taken to ensure that such access will not be available, and to date, no security breaches have occurred. Incarcerated students also do not have direct contact with their instructors. Instead, the Department of Corrections has hired 14 full-time facilitators with college degrees to monitor the classes, answer questions, and pass messages between faculty and students, if necessary.

The program offers 57 different courses and has enrolled nearly 400 prisoners. Students are just beginning to receive degrees through the program. The first graduate received his associate's degree in December 2004, two prisoners graduated in May 2005, and nine more applied for summer 2005 graduation. Because the distance education program is so new, only associate's degrees are currently offered. Students may matriculate in either University Studies or Business Administration, with a majority currently choosing the University Studies track. In Fall 2006, an associate's degree in Computer Information Systems will be added to the curriculum. As more prisoners receive their associate's degrees, the program will expand degree offerings to include bachelor's degrees.

Before enrolling in a course, prisoners sign an agreement outlining their responsibilities. If they fail to maintain a 2.5 grade point average or if they are transferred to a higher security facility for disciplinary reasons, the cost of their tuition and books must be repaid before they may enroll in additional college courses. As a result of this policy, course completion rates have risen from 50 percent to 90 percent. The high number of correctional facilities offering this program has contributed to the improved course completion rate as well. Under this system, when prisoners are moved to another facility through no fault of their own, they may immediately enroll in the same course with the same instructor at their new facility.

The cost of this program is covered almost entirely by the state Department of Corrections. Along with paying for building and maintaining the computer labs and paying the salaries of the facilitators, the department pays Eastern New Mexico University-Roswell approximately $215,000 annually to cover tuition, fees, and books for the 400 incarcerated students (at a cost of only about $500 per student) and to cover the expense of administering the program and converting existing distance education courses for use in prisons. The university is also eligible for state formula funding for each incarcerated student.

Ultimately, the state envisions this program existing at all state prisons as well as at several privately-operated prisons in the state. Corrections officials believe that it is an efficient use of state funds, especially since more prisoners graduate and are better equipped to seek employment after their release from prison. The program's success is also a strong indication that Internet-based distance education can work in prisons, despite the many security concerns raised by corrections officials. New Mexico's model is one that can and should be emulated by other states, especially states with smaller and more geographically dispersed prison systems for which traditional postsecondary correctional education programs can be prohibitively expensive.

Organizational issues

The ability of state prison systems to develop policies that facilitate prisoner enrollment in and completion of postsecondary programs is limited by the often complex relationships between corrections staff and correctional educators, who in some states do not even work for the same agency. In most states, correctional education is a department within the state agency responsible for corrections. In some states, however, a separate agency, with its own set of administrators and policies, is responsible for correctional education, frequently through a correctional school district. In a few states, correctional education is actually administered by the state's education agency. These multiple agencies can create additional layers of bureaucracy and sometimes have conflicting priorities. Corrections officials, for instance, may be more concerned with prison security than with correctional education. In any case, corrections officials and correctional educators must have a strong working relationship if postsecondary correctional education programs are to succeed. Strong relationships can overcome some of the problems mentioned above. In Texas, for example, prisoners enrolled in college courses are rarely transferred to another facility, and if they are, it is an easy matter for officials in the correctional school district to get them quickly transferred back.

. . . corrections officials and correctional educators must have a strong working relationship if postsecondary correctional education programs are to succeed.

Interagency relationships are only part of the picture, however. In many states, even if correctional education is administered by the corrections agency, the actual authority to permit a postsecondary program at a particular correctional facility lies with the warden of that facility. If the warden objects to the use of public funds to pay for college classes, no program will be offered even if money is available. As a result, many states have postsecondary programs only in certain correctional facilities, and those may be eliminated at any time if a new warden objects. Similarly, policies regarding correspondence courses, use of the prison library, and possession of textbooks and other materials often vary from prison to prison within a state. These problems point to the need for clear and consistent policies at the state level. The states with the largest postsecondary correctional education programs—Texas and North Carolina—have both a culture of commitment to correctional education within their corrections agencies and clearly-defined policies that apply to all correctional facilities, enabling and even requiring them to offer higher education to prisoners.

An additional organizational complication stems from the fact that postsecondary education must be offered by a degree-granting institution if incarcerated students are to receive a credential at the end of their studies or at least be able to transfer the college credit they have earned once they are released. In many states, correctional education at the Adult Basic Education and GED levels is administered entirely in-house, with classes taught by corrections employees. Offering college courses requires the involvement of an external educational institution.

In many states, the process of negotiating with a local college or university to provide instruction is left to each correctional facility, just as the authority to even allow postsecondary programs rests with some wardens. This process is a challenging one, and a number of states reported that it puts a heavy burden on the already short-staffed facilities.

States with larger postsecondary enrollments have solved this problem by centralizing the process. In Washington, for example, the Department of Corrections contracts with the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to administer the for-credit vocational certificate programs offered to prisoners. North Carolina has taken this process a step further by creating a formal interagency partnership between the Department of Corrections and the North Carolina Community College System in which each partner has clearly delineated responsibilities and each pays a portion of the cost of providing postsecondary education to the state's prison population.

Opposition from policymakers and the public

Some survey respondents noted that policymakers in their states are not especially supportive of offering higher education to prisoners. In many cases, this lack of support is demonstrated by reduced funding, or no funding, for postsecondary correctional education programs. Without support from legislators and other state officials, expanding or even maintaining higher education programs for prisoners can be virtually impossible.

Public opinion, however, seems to be moving toward a more supportive view of prison programming. In 2002, a study funded by the Open Society Institute found that 66 percent of Americans want the criminal justice system to emphasize the rehabilitation of prisoners through education or job training programs rather than simply using prisons as a place to "warehouse" people who will eventually be released back into their communities. On the other hand, 55 percent of those surveyed believe that current efforts to rehabilitate prisoners have been unsuccessful, a belief supported by high recidivism rates (Peter D. Hart Research Associates 2002). This perspective on incarceration marks a major shift in public opinion away from the "tough-on-crime" rhetoric of recent decades. It also suggests that the public—and the policymakers they influence—may soon be ready to support higher education for prisoners but only if presented with evidence that postsecondary correctional education works.

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As it stands, much of the public attention paid to postsecondary correctional education programs has been negative. While the issue has not had much attention since the debate over Pell Grant eligibility a decade ago, occasional newspaper stories with headlines like "Wife-killer learns his way out of prison"—reporting on an Indiana man who reduced his sentence by using "good time" credits offered to prisoners who complete educational programs—do not help clarify public perceptions (Higgins 2005). The truth is that postsecondary correctional education has a public relations problem. The public is not, for the most part, aware that such programs have been shown to reduce recidivism and save tax dollars, that prison systems tend to emphasize vocational education and the acquisition of job skills, and that many states apply fairly stringent eligibility requirements when deciding which prisoners should be able to take advantage of postsecondary educational opportunities.

Gaining support for postsecondary correctional education will require increased public awareness of these issues. The information is certainly available; the last few

years have seen the publication of a number of important recidivism studies and cost-benefit analyses. Interesting the media and the public in these studies has been a far more challenging matter. To reach the widest audience, advocates of higher education for prisoners could find common cause with the range of groups whose interests this issue touches—from criminal justice and higher education professionals to the many nonprofit organizations that work to improve the lives of young minority men, the social group most directly affected by both low rates of college attendance and high rates of incarceration (LoBuglio 2003).

. . . prisoners should be obligated to make some attempt at self-improvement while incarcerated.

One potentially valuable approach to this public relations problem, as researcher Stefan LoBuglio has noted, may be to emphasize the importance of inmate accountability. This approach suggests that prisoners should be obligated to make some attempt at self-improvement while incarcerated. Participation in educational programs, together with work assignments and various treatment programs, would actually be mandatory during incarceration (LoBuglio 2003). Rather than thinking of postsecondary correctional education as a reward for committing a crime, which is the way some policymakers have described it, this perspective views education as part of a larger effort on the part of the criminal justice system to require prisoners to make some contribution in return for their room and board and to try to ensure that formerly incarcerated people, after release from prison, have the skills and attitudes necessary to become productive citizens. As currently practiced, inmate accountability usually also includes a requirement that prisoners reimburse the prison system for their room and board and any programs or treatment they receive (Box 7). Such reimbursement requirements make sense only if ex-offenders can reasonably be expected to find employment at decent wages after release from prison.

The need for state-level support

As the discussions in this chapter and the last illustrate, overcoming the barriers that prevent prisoners from gaining access to higher education will be a challenging process. These barriers are influenced by a variety of factors ranging from the severely inadequate funding of most postsecondary correctional education programs to exacting security issues in prisons and the poor academic preparation of many prisoners. The most significant issue, however, is one of state-level support for postsecondary correctional education programs.

State-level support—particularly from corrections officials and elected officials—fosters the success of well-established higher enrollment postsecondary programs like those in Texas and North Carolina and innovative experiments like New Mexico's distance-education program. In most states, such support is not present. Lack of state-level support makes it nearly impossible for correctional educators to find sufficient funding and to overcome institutional barriers. Developing effective postsecondary correctional education programs in these states will require building consensus and commitment among all stakeholders as well as visionary leadership. Leaders must be willing to commit substantial financial resources for creative new solutions to the many challenges that obstruct delivery of higher education to prisoners.

BOX 7: INMATE ACCOUNTABILITY

As prison systems are confronted with the need to educate inmates as a part of efforts to reduce recidivism but at the same time face reduced state funding, one alternative to eliminating programs is to shift the burden of payment to the prisoners themselves. As previously noted, however, most prisoners have very little money of their own and, most often, few family resources on which to rely. In an effort to solve this problem and respond to a legislative mandate, Texas has developed a program in which the state pays for college courses for qualified prisoners but requires repayment after release. This program emphasizes the need for inmate accountability while still recognizing that most prisoners cannot pay for a college education while in prison but may be able to pay after release, especially if they are able to obtain better jobs using their newly gained credentials.

The state of Texas has one of the largest prison system in the country—136 correctional facilities incarcerating nearly 167,000 people as of December 2003 (Harrison & Beck 2004). Correctional education has been a key component of the Texas prison system for many years. In 1969, the Texas legislature established the Windham School District with the motto: "Fighting Crime Through Education." Despite a recent 19 percent budget cut, Windham School District remains one of the largest correctional education agencies in the nation with 1,300 staff members and nearly 85,000 students each year at all educational levels.

In the 2003-2004 academic year, 46 Texas correctional facilities offered postsecondary education for 9,694 prisoners—about 6 percent of the state's prison population. Nearly two-thirds of these incarcerated students were working toward associate's degrees, and most others were enrolled in vocational certificate programs. Texas had a 24 percent completion rate for its postsecondary program, one of the highest seen in this study, and in 2003-04, awarded 1,885 vocational certificates, 415 associate's degrees, 58 bachelor's degrees, and 22 master's degrees. Fifteen public two-year colleges and three public universities provided postsecondary education for prisoners. These colleges and universities, in addition to tuition and fees, also receive formula funding from the state for incarcerated students, and so the institutions actively recruit students for their prison programs.

Texas's reimbursement program, started in 1996, creates an account for each incarcerated student and deducts the cost of each course taken from the balance. When prisoners are released, they work with their parole officers to negotiate a manageable payment plan. To date, 3,000 ex-offenders have paid their debt in full. About 25 percent of the amount owed to the state—$1.1 million—has been repaid through monthly payments averaging about $100. This money is funneled back into higher education programming in the state's prisons; in 2003-04, more than $250,000 was added to the budget through the reimbursement program.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

In America today, policymakers are often reluctant to take positions that could be labeled "soft on crime." From their perspective, the idea of offering higher education to prisoners can be a hard sell. Nonetheless, research provides strong evidence that postsecondary correctional education can improve conditions within correctional facilities, enhance prisoner self-esteem and prospects for employment after release from prison, and function as a cost-effective approach to reducing recidivism. Given the enormous number of people incarcerated in the United States, the vast majority of whom will someday be released and return to their communities, higher education for prisoners has considerable potential to help ensure that these formerly incarcerated people are equipped to build productive lives and remain out of prison. As this report shows, however, there are many barriers that prevent most prisoners from gaining access to such educational opportunities. New policy measures are necessary if these barriers are to be overcome, and creating such measures requires a commitment from policymakers.

A decade after the loss of Pell Grant eligibility for state and federal prison inmates, the number of prisoners enrolled in higher education programs has rebounded but remains low compared to the overall prison population. As of 2003-04, more than 85,000 prisoners—just under 5 percent of the total prison population—were taking college courses. The vast majority of these incarcerated students, however, came from only 15 prison systems. Prison systems with larger postsecondary enrollments tend to have sizeable inmate populations, a focus on shorter vocational degree and certificate programs, and substantial public funding for postsecondary correctional education. Moreover, with the exception of for-credit vocational certificate programs, most prison systems have low numbers of completed degrees, a serious concern considering the importance American society places on achieving a postsecondary credential.

Lack of funding is the key barrier that prevents many state prison systems from enrolling more prisoners in college courses. While state funding plays an essential role in higher-enrollment prison systems, many lower-enrollment systems rely primarily on funding from the federal Incarcerated Youth Offender Grants, a funding source that limits the number of prisoners eligible for higher education programs and that depends on annual renewal by Congress. In addition, prisoners frequently do not enroll in, and complete, postsecondary programs because of poor academic preparation, logistical problems, and state or institutional policies that make it difficult to provide higher education in prison. Above all, lack of support from policymakers and the public makes each of these barriers more challenging.

Additional funding is needed to increase the number of prisoners who have access to higher education. At the federal level, Congress should reinstate Pell Grant eligibility for prisoners, expand the Incarcerated Youth Offender Grant program, and eliminate the cap on the use of Perkins Vocational–Technical Education Act funding for prison programs. As this study shows, however, relying on federal funding for postsecondary educational programs

is not enough. Prison systems must diversify their funding sources by looking at ways to solicit resources from foundations, colleges and universities, corporations, and private individuals. At the same time, state policymakers, whose constituents benefit most from reduced recidivism, should work to expand state funding by allocating additional funds to the public colleges and universities that provide instruction for postsecondary correctional education programs, by allowing prisoners to receive state grants for low-income students, and by appropriating sufficient funds to allow state agencies to operate postsecondary correctional education programs.

State-level support is essential if postsecondary correctional education programs are to thrive. State prisons systems with larger postsecondary enrollments have developed partnerships among the various state agencies responsible for corrections, correctional education, and higher education. Community colleges, in particular, have been valuable allies in the effort to offer college classes to prisoners. The work of such partnerships is enhanced when corrections agencies are able to develop state and institutional policies that strongly support postsecondary correctional education. For example, policies that reduce the number of involuntary transfers, that encourage experiments with distance education methods, that allow corrections staff to participate in college courses offered at correctional facilities, and that recognize the need for placement testing and remedial education are all ways to overcome the barriers that reduce higher education enrollments and completions in the prison system. Support from elected officials and from state administrators in corrections and postsecondary education is crucial to the ongoing success of postsecondary correctional education in a state. States whose leaders acknowledge the potential value of higher education for prisoners and offer financial and structural support are in a position to develop stable and effective postsecondary correctional education programs.

Building state-level support for postsecondary correctional education will necessarily involve educating policymakers and the public. This study—like others—suggests that postsecondary correctional education programs are cost-effective ways to reduce recidivism, that most prisoners are enrolled in educational programs intended to directly improve their employment prospects after release from prison, and that prison systems are finding ways to ensure that prisoners take a share of the financial responsibility for their own education. Sharing this evidence with policymakers and the public will be essential if advocates for postsecondary correctional education are to initiate a much-needed national dialogue about the value of offering higher education to prisoners. In this effort, moreover, advocates for postsecondary correctional education cannot work alone but will need to enlist the support of the many organizations concerned about issues of both prisoner rehabilitation and re-entry and access to higher education for disadvantaged groups. Focusing on the concept of inmate accountability may be a way to overcome resistance to the idea of offering higher education to prisoners.

There remains, however, room for hope. As this report has demonstrated, some incarcerated men and women are getting a college education, and some prison systems are developing innovative strategies for overcoming the many barriers that prevent prisoners from gaining access to higher education. As a result, despite the tight state budgets of the last few years, enrollment in postsecondary correctional education has returned to the levels seen before the loss of the Pell Grants in 1994. With continued work and support, these numbers can grow and bring added benefits both to prisoners themselves and to society as a whole.

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Appendix

Survey Methodology

Correctional education administrators for each prison system were identified using the Correctional Education Association's 2004 *Directory for Correctional Educators* and a list of Incarcerated Youth Offender state grant coordinators obtained from the U.S. Department of Education. Preliminary telephone and email contacts were used to determine the appropriate person to complete the survey for each prison system.

The survey instrument was designed with the assistance of an expert advisory group and was reviewed by correctional education officials in several states. The survey was then sent by both postal mail and email to the designated state and federal contacts in February 2005. Recipients were asked to mail or fax the completed survey to the Institute for Higher Education Policy by March 15. An additional copy of the survey was sent by email in late March to those prison systems that had not yet responded, and follow-up phone calls were made in April to non-respondents reminding them to complete the survey.

The survey closed at the end of April 2005 with 45 states and the Federal Bureau of Prisons responding. States not responding to the survey were Florida, Kansas, Kentucky, New Hampshire, and New York.

Survey Instrument

[*Note: This survey has been reformatted for publication.*]

Prisoner Access to Postsecondary Education Survey

Name of Person Completing Survey: _____

Title: _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: (_____)_____ Email: _____

Please feel free to explain or expand on your answers in the margins or on the back of the pages.

Definitions

Adult Correctional Facility includes all confinement facilities administered by state or federal government or by private corporations primarily for state or federal government, which are intended for adults but sometimes hold juveniles. This term includes:

- Prisons, penitentiaries, and correctional institutions
- State-operated local detention facilities in Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Rhode Island, and Vermont

This definition corresponds to that used by the Bureau of Justice Statistics for its Census of State and Federal Adult Correctional Facilities.

Postsecondary Education is defined as either traditional/academic or vocational/certificate coursework taken after a student receives a high school diploma or GED, for which a student can receive college credit.

Traditional/Academic Coursework is coursework for college credit that leads to an Associate's degree (e.g. AA, AS), a Bachelor's degree (e.g. BA, BS), or a Graduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, JD, PhD).

Vocational/Certificate Coursework is coursework for college credit that leads to an applied degree (e.g. AAS) or a certificate (e.g. certificate in auto mechanics).

1. How many adult correctional facilities in your state offered postsecondary education courses or programs during the 2003-2004 academic year?

2. What percentage of these programs are vocational courses offered for college credit? If exact numbers cannot be provided, please give your best estimate.

3. Please list the names of the postsecondary educational institutions that provided instruction for any postsecondary education courses or programs offered.

4. What means were used to provide instruction for any postsecondary courses offered? (Please check all that apply)

   ❑ On-site instruction
   ❑ Video/satellite instruction
      ❑ One way
      ❑ Interactive
   ❑ Correspondence courses
   ❑ Internet-based instruction
      ❑ One way
      ❑ Interactive
   ❑ Other, please specify_____

5. What percentage of your state's adult correctional facilities population is believed to possess either a high school diploma or GED?

6. In addition to possessing either a GED or high school diploma, what other factors influence inmates' eligibility to participate in postsecondary education programs? (Please check all that apply for all adult correctional facilities in your state, even if eligibility requirements vary among sites or programs)

Inmate's age	Reason for incarceration
Length of incarceration	Length of time to release
Number of infractions while incarcerated	Standardized test scores

Other, please specify_____

7. What is the total number of inmates who participated in institutionally-recognized postsecondary education courses or programs in your state during the 2003-2004 academic year?

8. During the 2003-2004 academic year, how many inmates who fulfilled any eligibility requirements were placed on postsecondary educational programming waitlists and were unable to participate?

9. Does your state have a policy regarding inmate participation in postsecondary education via correspondence courses?

   ❑ Yes *(If yes, please include a copy of this policy when you return the survey)*

   ❑ No

10. Please indicate the number of inmates in your state who participated in the postsecondary education program types listed below during the 2003-2004 academic year. *This question is only concerned with inmates who took courses leading to college credit*. If exact numbers cannot be provided, please give your best estimate of the number or percentage of inmates who participated in each of the following program types.

    A. Total Traditional/Academic Community College/ Associate's Degree Level _____

    College or University/Bachelor's Degree Level _____

    Graduate School/Graduate or Professional Degree Level _____

    B. Total Vocational/Certificate_____

11. Can inmates in your state be awarded degrees for postsecondary coursework completed while incarcerated? (Please check one)

    ❑ Yes, while incarcerated

    ❑ Yes, but only after release

    ❑ No (skip question 12)

12. If inmates in your state can be awarded degrees, please indicate the number of degrees awarded to inmates in the 2003-2004 academic year.

    Associate's Degree (e.g. AA, AS, AAS) _____

    Bachelor's Degree (e.g. BA, BS)_____

    Graduate Degree (e.g. MA, MS, PhD)_____

    Vocational Certificate_____

13. Please indicate the number of inmates in your state whose postsecondary education was funded through each of the sources listed below. If exact numbers cannot be provided, please give your best estimate of the number or percentage of inmates funded by these sources during the 2003-2004 academic year.

    _____ Federal Incarcerated Youth Offender Grant

    _____ State Funding _____ Local Funding

    _____ College or University Funding

    _____ Private Funding (Foundation, Religious/Community Group, Individual Donation)

    Please specify _____

    _____

    _____ Personal or Family Finances

    _____ Other Funding Source

    Please specify _____

    _____

14. Please use the following space or attach additional pages to provide any additional comments about access to postsecondary education for prisoners in your state. In particular, we would be interested to know more about the following topics:

    - Any special funding sources that help provide postsecondary education for prisoners in your state
    - Any particular challenges in providing postsecondary education for prisoners (financial, political, administrative, logistical, etc.)
    - Any innovative means of providing access to postsecondary education for prisoners in your state

If you have brochures, program descriptions, or policy documents about postsecondary education in your state facilities, we would appreciate it if you would include copies of them with this survey. Thank you!